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IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

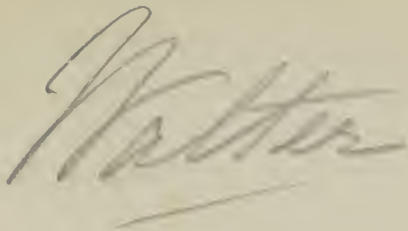
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THE
LEADEN CASKET.

CHAPTER XVI.

Paris. Sweet, above thought, I love thee.

Troilus and Cressida.

It was the end of October, and Lady Brooke had been at Invergrudie since the middle of August. Ten weeks. She had wished for a change of air, and she had had it—now she was anxious to get back to London; but before she set out on her journey, the last touch must be put to the engagement between Olive and Sir John Ellerton.

‘Tell Miss Brooke I want to see her at once,’ said she to Pearson, her maid. Olive came, not without some trepidation, for this was Monday, and she knew that on Wednesday

they were to leave Invergrudie for home. Lady Brooke was seated in a very easy chair, by a very cheerful fire, in her own most comfortable room. Two pretty little feet rested on the fender. She raised her eyes from the fire she delighted in to Olive's reluctant face, and said, 'Olive, I think you will allow that I have fulfilled my part of our contract with great exactness. I have not harassed you with entreaties to like Sir John. I am pleased to see that you do like him much better—I knew you would.'

Olive shrugged her shoulders a little 'I do like him better, but I am still very far from feeling as you wish me to feel towards him.

'Nonsense! It is my belief, Olive, that you have very foolish ideas about love and marriage. All that novel-reading which you indulged in when you were a child has filled your head with folly. You expect, I dare say, to be over head and ears in love with the man whom you marry—to think him a hero, and that you would almost lose your senses if parted from him—but do people go on in that silly way in

real life? I am here ; I am quite happy, though your father is in India ; and I am sure he and I are fond of each other. Lady Ellerton lost her husband three years ago—do you want to be happier than she is? You look for an amount of feeling in such matters that only exists in books.’

This was a most powerful argument with Olive, who had sometimes said the very same thing to herself, and thought it might possibly be true.

‘ You respect him ? ’

‘ Yes, I think I do—he is not exactly a man to make a hero of.’

‘ Thank God, no ! ’ cried Lady Brooke. ‘ What would become of you if you married a man who was as *tête montée* as yourself?—As it is, you will improve each other.’

‘ But I want some one who will improve me.’

‘ Well,’ said Lady Brooke coldly, ‘ I do not see why he should not even do that.’

Olive was silent. She was passing all the married couples of her acquaintance in review. She found none whose happiness was the

happiness of which she sometimes dreamed. Perhaps she dreamed of what was unattainable.

“Your father has a great wish that this marriage should take place,” said Lady Brooke, returning to the charge.

“You never told me so,” cried Olive, much aggrieved.

“You need not have required to be told that! I’ll read you what he says—I’ll show you his letter, if you like.”

“Please do,” cried Olive eagerly. This was the first letter of her father’s which her mother had ever put into her hand. She read: “If my dear Olive marries Sir John Ellerton, and if he is all that you say he is, her marriage will remove a whole world of pain and anxiety from me. I shall be a happier man than I have been for years. It will be a very good thing for Olive herself, and for her sisters also. You, my dear Honora, will feel happy in leaving Amabel with her,—in fact, it would simplify our course in every way, and is all that I could wish for her.” Tears ran down Olive’s face. Her father wrote very lovingly about

her—she was thinking of him, and not of Sir John.

‘Well, dear,’ said Lady Brooke kindly; ‘you see what he says.’

‘Why did you not show me this letter sooner?’

‘It is about Sir John—I did not wish to urge you about that until the time came—it has come.’

‘And my father would really be pleased if I accepted Sir John?’

‘He would be delighted! you have read his letter.’

‘And what does he mean about Amabel?’

‘She is delicate. If she goes back to India with me, the doctors think it will kill her. I could leave her with you, but I do not know anyone else to whom I could entrust her. This air might cure her.’

‘Is this air so good? Sir John tells me that it would cure Uncle Richard.’

‘It is the very breath of life to an invalid. Olive, it would be very nice for you to have your uncle a great deal with you, and to see him recover his health—he only wants good

air and quiet, and both are to be had in plenty here.'

'Still,' said Olive, 'one can't accept a man because one's relations will be benefited by good air!'

'No, but it goes for something—it is one good thing more, where all is good already. You want a hero out of a novel. I myself think Sir John worth fifty such. He has nearly twenty thousand a year.'

'Oh, I don't care about money!' said Olive loftily.

'All girls say that, but they care for what money gives them. You would have everything your heart could desire, and be able to help your friends as well. He has this estate here, another in Yorkshire, and a third in Cumberland. Olive, you must be mad to hesitate, and he is so fond of you—I don't see how you can have the heart to think of refusing him. Tell me what it is you dislike in him.'

'Nothing except a want of elevation.'

'Elevate him, then! You will have plenty of time and opportunity,' said Lady Brooke with a sneer.

‘It is not so much that I feel any want in him, as in myself—I do not love him. All the advantages which you have set before me seem tempting and delightful, but should I accept him if he were a poor man?’

‘Of course not! that would be a very different thing! In that case, no one would ask you to accept him—no one would wish it.’

‘Then, I ought not to accept him as it is.’

‘Nonsense! You are not called upon to consider what you would have done if he had been a poor man—a poor man would not have offered to a girl in your position of life. We have nothing to do with poor men, and don’t want to have. Dear Olive, consider how Sir John loves you—how his mother loves you—how much your father wishes it—what great acts of kindness you could show to those dear to you when once you had wealth in your power—look at life as it is, and forget your silly old novels. You will distress your father most terribly if you miss such a chance of happiness.’

Olive sat down to think of all these things. Up to this time she had been standing with her

father's letter in her hand. Her heart was very full. She was afraid her mother was right, and that she was ruined by romance-reading. She was turning aside from the course naturally marked out for her happiness, and making a very good, kind man, and every one else who cared for her, unhappy, because of some fancied shortcomings in him. What was she, that she should be so exacting?

‘Your father is not a rich man, Olive,’ said Lady Brooke: ‘not for his position, I mean. I can assure you of one thing, and that is, if you will but do as we all wish, you will remove an immense amount of anxiety from his mind. It was miserable to see him sometimes before I came away. I could not bear to look at him.’

‘What was he so unhappy about?—surely not about money matters?’

‘Oh, no, not money matters. Will you take my word for what I am saying? I don't want to explain things more fully to you now; but if you will accept Sir John, your father will be a changed man.’

Olive found these repeated appeals almost

insupportable. She rose slowly to her feet, and stood a moment with head thrown back and lips pressed tightly together. Her eyes were troubled, and her heart was full of doubt 'I wish I knew what Uncle Richard would say,' cried she in desperate perplexity; 'he knows far better what is good for me than any one else.'

'He says this,' said Lady Brooke, producing a letter from him. 'I wrote to ask him what his real opinion was. "I think you are acting very wisely and kindly in not pressing dear Olive in any way, and in giving her such an excellent opportunity of forming an accurate opinion of Sir J. E.'s character. A residence of so many weeks under the same roof ought to enable her to judge of her feelings. If she can be happy with him, the marriage is all that can be desired by those who have her interests most at heart."' '

'There!' cried her mother. 'Now you know what your Uncle Richard says!'

Olive looked at her mother with eyes full of tears. She was being hemmed in to a very narrow circle, but she was resolved to have a

little more time to think—and to be alone. ‘I will go into the garden for one hour,’ she said, ‘and then I will come back and tell you what I will do.’

Lady Brooke was obliged to turn aside. She was afraid of Olive seeing the gleam of triumph in her eyes. She knew that she had her safe, but she only said, ‘I trust you to do your best to please us all.’

Slowly Olive went to her own room, mechanically she took her hat and cloak, and went to the garden. As she crossed the hall, Sir John was just starting for a great county meeting at the nearest town. ‘I wish I had not to go,’ he exclaimed. ‘It is very hard, when you are leaving us so soon. I don’t see the use of going, for I know where my thoughts will be.’ As he spoke, Olive felt his eyes rest on hers with such intensity of affection that she could not meet their gaze. Lady Ellerton took her hand in hers, but did not speak, and together they watched him drive away. Then she turned and examined Olive’s face very closely, but nothing was to be learnt from it, save that she was very full of thought. She

kissed her, and went to some visitors whom she would fain have seen depart. Olive went into the deserted garden, and walked amongst the cold frost-bitten shrubs for some time, and when her hour was over she went to her mother's room, and said, 'I will accept him.'

Sir John did not come home until nearly eight o'clock, and two friends came back from the meeting with him; but as soon as Olive saw his face, she knew that the good news had been conveyed to him. Lady Ellerton, too, was young and beautiful with happiness. There were visitors in the house, and Olive had kept out of the way all the afternoon, but Lady Brooke had evidently taken care that her tidings should run like bush-fire in that one direction.

One of the gentlemen who had returned with Sir John Ellerton was Mr. Ardrossan. He took Olive in to dinner, and must have found her rather deficient in conversation, though by fits and starts she roused herself and talked as best she could.

'It is rather hard that you should be leaving

the country just as I am coming,' said he. 'I have been in Switzerland for six weeks, but I thought I must have a few weeks here as well.' Olive knew nothing of Switzerland, but said she thought Scotland magnificent; on which Sir John Ellerton cast his eyes down on his plate and sat looking perfectly happy, and as if he were the scenery which was being praised so much.

'You have seen the Pass of Duich, of course?'

'Yes, we went there when I first came.'

'But you did not go on to Glen Duich—my house is there, and the view you get of the Pass from my windows is one of the finest things in the three kingdoms.'

'These Scotchmen, my dear,' said Lady Ellerton in the drawing-room, 'always put the best foot foremost. He thinks that if you go away without seeing the Pass of Duich from his house, the finger of shame will be pointed at you when you go back to London; now I, on the contrary, am afraid that very few persons in London know that there is such a place. I am glad my John is a nice simple

Yorkshireman. However, to-morrow we are to go to Glen Duich, and then you will see Mr. Ardrossan's house and everything that is to be seen there. He is determined we shall go.'

'I should like to see his pictures. Is it far?'

'Oh, no, not in fine weather. It is ten miles off, just beyond the Pass. He is staying the night here, and will escort us himself. But do not let us think of him now, Olive,' and here the happy old lady let her voice sink to a whisper. 'Come to my room after we have all said good-night; I must have ten minutes' conversation with you, dear child.'

Olive half shivered—she was afraid that Sir John would be there; she thought with deep gratitude of Colonel Douglas and his sisters and Messrs. Ardrossan and Erskine, the visitors whose presence had staved off the evil moment of explanation for so long.

Lady Ellerton's room was a very pretty sitting-room, opening out of her bedroom. A wood fire burned cheerfully in the grate and threw a clear light on the portrait of

the late Sir John, beneath which, when Olive entered, young Sir John was standing. She started; Lady Ellerton came forward, kissed her, and said 'Sit down by the fire, Olive dear; I do not seem to have had a single glimpse of you all day. I wish the Douglasses had not happened to be here.' Then she added hastily, 'By-the-bye, I have quite forgotten to say that we must have breakfast half an hour earlier. We must have daylight to see those pictures.'

Olive saw that this was merely an excuse to leave her alone with Sir John, so she put her hand on the bell and said, 'Let me ring.'

'Oh, no!' cried Lady Ellerton hastily, 'don't ring. Hastings is in my room—I'll send her; I want to dismiss her, anyhow.' She went into her room, but she shut the door after her. 'Oh dear,' thought Olive, 'that dreadful Sir John will be going down on his knees or something; I do so wish I had not said that I would accept him.' The next moment the nervousness which, in very dread of itself, made her indulge in flippant reflections, was all dispersed by one touch of solemn earnest.

‘Olive,’ said Sir John—‘I may call you Olive, mayn’t I?—Lady Brooke says that you will really do your best to try to love me.’ There was so much loving humility in his words and manner, that Olive, impulsive as ever, felt prompted to say something to make him happy—to tell him that she did love him, and would heartily endeavour to be a good wife to him; but the bigness of the words was too much for her, and she could only stammer, ‘I will try, I think you very good and kind to me, and very patient too.’

‘Patient! good! kind! I would wait for you for ever! Only let me love you—only let me see you as I have done these last happy weeks—and you will make me the happiest fellow on earth. Olive, you must trust yourself to me.’ He took her hand and kissed it—he held it fast in his. Olive felt as if she was mastered by his strong will. She did not dare to put forward any objections—to hint at any shortcomings in her affection.

‘I know I am a great stupid fellow, fit for nothing but men’s society; I know you think

so, and you are right; but, Olive, if I have you with me, I shall improve. I will read whatever you like, and we will travel—you can make me very different, I am sure, only it is not fair to ask you to take such trouble.'

Olive could only murmur, 'You are better than I am,' and she felt that she spoke the truth; but she would be equal to his expectations, and worthy of his trust.

'I believe I loved you the first time I saw you,' said he. 'You don't know how I tried to get that dear novel-writing aunt of yours in Harley Street to give me an invitation to her house, but she wouldn't. I say, Olive, you know about these things, and I don't, but does she write good novels? I fancy, if she did, she would have had a softer place in her heart for a poor fellow like me who was so fond of you, however stupid she might think him.'

'You are not stupid at all,' cried Olive, who could not bear to hear him speak so humbly.

'Oh, yes, I am—but no man is stupid who

has a clever wife, and when I have got you I shall hold my head as high as any genius living. You shall have all your own way; I am quite content to surrender myself to your management.'

'You won't give up shooting?' said Olive interrogatively.

'Well, no,' said Sir John in much dismay; 'you must leave me that—I'll give up everything but that.'

Shooting was the only thing he did, so Olive could not see that he was making much sacrifice here, but she had no wish to demand any sacrifice at all. 'Don't call rabbits vermin, then,' said she, smiling. He laughed, and said they should be left to flourish as they chose until the day when she herself came to demand their extinction as a necessity. She laughed also, but she was not by any means in a laughing mood. She knew the solemnity of what she was doing. She felt a certain satisfaction in being so necessary to his happiness, but that was not enough to still the pangs of conscience which told her that something was wanting which ought to have been there. 'It is late,'

said she; 'I must go. I wonder where Lady Ellerton is?'

'Call her mother,' said he; 'she loves you like a mother.'

Before many minutes had passed, Lady Ellerton returned. She saw Sir John's happy face—she saw Olive's hand in his. 'God bless you both,' said she; 'I felt all would end well!' She drew a large diamond and emerald ring off her finger and put it into Sir John's hand. He looked at it for a moment, and then with some solemnity placed it on Olive's finger. Lady Ellerton said, 'It is yours now, Olive. In our family, that ring goes to the eldest son's wife. As soon as the engagement takes place, it is put on her finger. My dear husband put it on mine just as John is putting it on yours. That ring has been passed on in that way for more than two hundred years. I have looked at it every day lately as I saw it shining on my finger, and hoped to have the great happiness of taking it off and putting it on yours. That is done now.—God grant that your married life may be as happy as mine was!' Tears

shone in Lady Ellerton's eyes. Olive felt choked. Lady Ellerton's words and manner terrified her—everything was so solemn, so in earnest; with that ring on her finger, she felt almost married; and the horror was, that she was not so much in earnest as they were: she was vowing so much and feeling so little; she was flattered by Sir John's devotion, touched by Lady Ellerton's kindness, but how terribly slender was the amount of feeling on her part compared with theirs! She could not bear this any longer—she must go to her own room. 'Good night,' she said humbly. She was deeply ashamed of herself. Lady Ellerton kissed her. 'Good night, dear,' said she very simply, but the very simplicity of her manner was another seal to her bond. Olive held out her hand to Sir John—she feared what might happen. Sir John took it, held it for a minute in his, and then said, 'Good night.'

'Nay, John,' exclaimed Lady Ellerton, 'kiss her, she is your own.' On this Sir John bent down, kissed her, and whispered fervently, 'Good night, my Olive.'

Olive did not know how she got to her room. She threw herself down on her knees, and hid her face in the bed, and sobbed and moaned and sobbed again, until at last fatigue overpowered her.

CHAPTER XVII.

Your Gallery

Have we passed through, not without much content
In many singularities.—*Winter's Tale.*

STRANGE to say, Olive awoke next morning feeling much less miserable. The night had brought comfort to her. Either she had suffered so much before she fell asleep that for the present she could feel no more, or her ideas had in some degree arranged themselves during sleep. However that might be, the prominent feeling in her mind now was that she was doing no wrong. She had not sought Sir John's love—when it was first offered her, her impulse had been to decline it. She had much disliked accepting the Ellertons' invitation to Scotland—she had felt at the time that she would be placed in a very disagreeable position if she went to stay in his house—her mother had left

her no choice—what had happened was no fault of hers. Moreover, it was not as if she were not going to do her very best to love him as she ought. She firmly intended to do that. Her mother said if she tried she was certain to succeed. Everyone said the same thing—she only hoped they were right. She lay in bed looking at the splendid ring which she had not removed from her finger. She wondered whether all the eldest sons' wives had been truly in love when first they felt that ring on their fingers. Perhaps some of these poor girls, whose day of life was now past and gone, had in the first instance felt much the same towards their Sir Johns as she was now feeling towards hers, but custom, and common interests, and slow-growing esteem had made them happy in their choice. What was being in love? Perhaps people were not intended to analyse their feelings so narrowly—and yet she found herself doing this every moment. While plaiting her hair, she put her hand back rapidly and felt the weight of her engaged ring. 'Ah,' thought she, 'if I really loved him, how I should like to be reminded of him by feeling

the weight of his ring at every movement! As it is—but I am sure to love him some time, mother says, and he is kind and good.'

It was a splendid late October morning. A hard frost of many days' standing had sealed all the small streams to silence. The sun made a thousand glittering points of light wherever its rays fell. Such a day lightens the heart. Such a glance as Sir John gave Olive ought to lighten it also. He saw her pale face, and pitied her: she had evidently not slept. He tried to throw a world of encouragement and affection into the brief greeting which society permitted them. She smiled at him faintly but hopefully, and hastened to her seat, for all the guests had taken their places at table some time before she entered. None guessed that so considerable a part of the drama of the lives of two of their number had been enacted since last they sat at table together. Olive and Sir John were expected to be as easy and indifferent as all the rest were.

Lady Ellerton, who charitably believed Lady Brooke's assertion that she was a great invalid, had paid her a hurried visit in her

bedroom that morning before breakfast. She wished to tell her how very happy both she and her son were, for the old lady loved Olive dearly.

‘Announce the engagement at once,’ said Lady Brooke. ‘That is what I advise you to do. Tell the Douglasses and the rest of the people—not in public, of course, but as a secret.’

‘It would not be a secret long.’

‘That’s the very thing! When a shy girl like Olive promises to marry, nothing hardens her so much in her resolution as to find every one knows of it.’

‘Oh no,’ said Lady Ellerton; ‘this is only the first day—it would be cruel—it must not be done.’

‘As you think best, but I am sure I am giving you good advice.’

‘You say you won’t go to Glen Duich?’ said Lady Ellerton, after protesting against sudden publicity.

‘No, thank you. I must rest for the journey—we shall be travelling to-morrow from early morning till late evening.’

Lady Brooke was quite equal to the fatigue, but did not care to drive ten miles to Glen Duich on a cold day, and ten miles back, to see a few pictures, just because Mr. Ardrossan had chosen them as good, when a shilling would open the door of any exhibition in London to her when she was there—as, thank Heaven, she would soon be. She had done her duty nobly. She had endured dull Sir John and his yet duller mother for nearly three months in the interest of Olive ; and now that heavy bit of work had been carried to a successful conclusion, and she was free to go back to town and enjoy herself.

They started for Glen Duich almost directly after breakfast. Lady Ellerton, the two Douglasses, and Olive drove ; the five gentlemen went on horseback. The horses' hoofs rang merrily on the hard road, and the party in the carriage looked supremely comfortable. Sealskin jackets and caps, big scarlet-lined fur rugs, a hot-water tin, and every contrivance possible, prevented all chance of cold. Olive looked beautiful, and Sir John Ellerton was not the only one who thought so. There was not much

opportunity for more than an occasional speech between those who drove and those who rode ; but Olive sat with her back to the horses, and those who followed could see her. She wore a pretty dark-green dress trimmed with rich dark fur which suited her to perfection. Madame Filoselle had been commissioned to make it for her on the very first appearance of cold weather. Her hat was of the same material, and beneath this Sir John could see the face he loved so much. His heart failed him when she looked thoughtful—for the most part, the beauty and strangeness of all she saw kept her bright and interested. The snow, which lay in thick patches and here and there in broad shining fields on the highest shoulder of the mountain which she knew so well, had scattered itself on the line of crags below in every variety of pattern, and every shade of perfect grey or russet or tawny gold—for black rock and brown heather and orange-coloured fern were subdued, not conquered by it, and many a dark precipice looking down on its own snow-filled hollow stood out with a bolder relief than had

ever met her eyes before. The birch-trees were all quite still, and made the blue of the sky dark with the brightness of their leaves—leaves with the latest brand of autumn on them.

‘Suppose a heavy snow-storm came on, and we were imprisoned here? Such things do happen in Scotland sometimes, Mr. Ardrossan,’ said one of the Douglasses.

‘Yes, but I hope nothing of that kind will occur until you are all safe at Glen Duich—then I don’t care if it snows for six months.’

Sir John Ellerton looked up; the keeper had that very morning predicted a snow-storm; but no one had believed him, and there seemed at present no danger of his prediction being verified.

Mr. Ardrossan’s house was large, well-built, and thoroughly comfortable. It stood under the shelter of a great pine wood, and from the windows was seen the Pass through which they had just come. ‘You must all be cold and hungry,’ said Mr. Ardrossan to the people who had risen from a most luxurious Highland breakfast to drive wrapped

in furs, in a most comfortable carriage, or mounted on good horses to canter over a good road. What could they know of cold or hunger? They did not repudiate the charge. They were rather cold and a little hungry; they thought it must be the sharp mountain air.

‘Luncheon will be on the table directly,’ said Mr. Ardrossan; ‘you must be very lenient to the manifold discomforts you will encounter in a poor bachelor’s house.’

‘A poor bachelor’s house!’ cried Miss Douglas gaily; ‘I don’t quite like owning it, but I never was in any bachelor’s house yet, without envying his comfort. No married people I know have things half so nice as the bachelors of my acquaintance. I fancy, if you let servants have all their own way, they make themselves comfortable and you too.’

‘But the pictures, Mr. Ardrossan?’ cried Lady Ellerton; ‘our minds are to be fed as well as our bodies.’

‘Not till after luncheon—one requires strength even to enjoy pictures.’

‘We will see those which are here, at any

rate,' exclaimed Miss Douglas. They were in the library—a very comfortable room with books all round it except on one side—the wall which was good for pictures, was reserved for them. Three or four very fine ones were hanging, and amongst these one gap occurred. 'Ah!' said Mr. Ardrossan disconsolately, 'that's because I lent my Old Crome to the Burlington-House people. It is a great nuisance! My room is miserable to me without it! The President came himself to ask me for it, and there's no resisting him! I wish I had, though—I ought not to have allowed myself to be talked over; I shall have nothing but vexation about it, I am sure. The principal thing these exhibitions do is to give a pack of critics an opportunity of proving to you that all your best pictures are forgeries—but they may say what they like—I don't care!'

'Critics seem to be very vexatious people,' observed Olive; 'my aunt, who writes, is always complaining of them.'

'Ah, these gatekeepers of art and literature are like turnpikemen, rather soured—they have

to stand in wet and cold and see people drive past in carriages which they themselves have no power to enter.'

'But what if the picture were really a forgery?' said Olive; 'I think I should be glad to have it found out, if it were mine.'

'And have a joy the less for the sake of truth and a wrench to one's feelings besides? One might almost be allowed to cling to an illusion in such a case. Don't you think so, Miss Brooke?'

'Oh, don't ask me!—I never knew what it was to be so fond of a picture; but why do people have critics?'

'Oh, the critics are all very well as detectives of picture-forgeries; but don't you feel sorry for people whose business consists in pulling things to pieces? The opposite temper of mind is a thousand times pleasanter to everybody, is it not?'

'The poets revenge themselves tremendously on the critics when they get the chance.'

'You will be on the poets' side,' said Mr. Ardrossan. 'I am sure you were very sorry

to give up your belief in fairies—if you have given it up, that is?’

‘Given it up! Not at all: kelpies and brownies and pixies I shall believe in always. There are some such awful black places—caverns and whirlpools—in the stream above Invergrudie! They frighten me with the felt presence of such beings.’

‘I know the stream. It is ghostly, but salmon-fishing has taken off the edge of some of its terrors for me. A true artist could never lose his sense of them. I’ll show you a picture of a stream which is only pretty—and is yet most precious from the painter’s deep feeling of the spiritual beauty of the scene. It is in the drawing-room. We will see it afterwards. But you are looking at my untidy writing-table, Miss Brooke. Would you not like Mrs. Barbauld’s prosaic little fairy to come and bring that to order?’

Olive had been looking at it, as she looked at everything that reminded her of her Aunt Selina. There was this difference between Mr. Ardrossan’s writing-table and that she was now thinking of—Mrs. Brooke did not require so many

books of reference as he appeared to do. They were lying about with paper-knives and slips of paper freely stuck into them, and very dry books most of them were.

‘It does look as if that praiseworthy little person you have reminded me of might find something to do. What a cheat that story was! I was so vexed when I read it.’

‘I must defend my table! It is quite tidy in reality—everything is arranged so that I can find it in a moment.’

‘And is all you want to write as ready?’ asked Olive.

He smiled gravely, and put his finger on a very much tormented page of manuscript. ‘I am trying to find my way through a difficult subject. I want to make people see that the old-fashioned virtue called faith is worth preserving. I have no pleasure in looking forward to the world’s possible progress, however splendid it may be, if we are to give up that.’

‘Faith has been rather a hard-worked virtue,’ interposed Colonel Douglas, and Olive saw that her little talk was over, for the others,

who had all been admiring a beautiful Persian cat, now came and joined them.

‘ There is a great deal more work for faith to do yet,’ rejoined Mr. Ardrossan, leading them away from his writing-table to the pictures. The manuscript which Olive had caught sight of was his intended contribution to the next discussion of the Berkeley Society, which was likely to be one of especial interest. This was a little knot of men which comprised some of the most subtle and acute thinkers of the day, and membership gave evidence of no small dialectical skill. The most opposite schools of thought were represented in it, and as a rule by their best men ; but, as might be expected in a society of which the principal object was the search for truth in its highest forms, all minor divisions were apt to be lost in that great division into which it has been said that all men’s minds naturally fall, according to their disposition to walk by faith or by sight. The subject of this next debate was one which could not fail to bring out the full combative strength of both sides.

Two bright-eyed, handsome boys came

into the dining-room just as they were all sitting down to luncheon. Mr. Ardrossan introduced them, and tried to make them take a part in the conversation. Afterwards Olive learnt that these were the sons of a Vaudois pastor, a poor man with a very large family, and that Mr. Ardrossan had brought them home with him to educate: he had already trained several boys in the same way. Mr. Ardrossan's character presented some strange contrasts. He was a Puritan and of the very straitest sect of Puritans, and at the same time he had a perfectly pagan enjoyment of art. He would defend the Westminster Confession of Faith against all comers, and then turn to a Turner drawing or a Greek coin, and dwell on it with a rapture which seemed to show that it supplied every need of his soul. In the dining-room where they were sitting, there were half a dozen pictures. 'I have my chair placed on a different side of the table every day of my life,' said he, 'that I may feast my eyes with a change every time I am in the room—that's why I have pictures on each wall. It is the turn of the

Rossetti to-day. Don't say you like it,' he exclaimed, trembling lest anyone should rush into a distressing burst of admiration. 'Just look at it carefully, and see how it grows on you.'

It was Dante and the dead Beatrice. She was lying on a bier, and reverently kneeling by its side was the worn but noble figure of the poet. The mystic colours of the curtain of the Jewish tabernacle were flung on her breast by a reflection from a painted window behind her; the sun was sinking fast, and all was solemn and still. Her face was most beautiful, and every detail of the picture nobly felt and rendered. Olive had never seen any picture she liked so much, and after some time she said so, and wondered why it was so impressive.

'It represents the strongest feeling of a strong man's entire life. Morrison never tired of looking at that picture when he was here; he said it was the subject which took his fancy, and I believe, from what he told me, that it had some special attraction for him; but still, in reality, I think it was the picture which he cared for most.'

‘Morrison!’ Olive started. Sir John was sitting next her and was saying something about skating, but, though she made some answer to him which was sufficient for purposes of conversation, she was listening most intently to Mr. Ardrossan, who was now answering a remark of Mr. Erskine’s: ‘He is a young man, but I have great faith in him. I have a picture of his I bought out of last Academy Exhibition; just a north-country stream with some trees, but with such magnificently painted water and reflections. By-the-bye, Miss Brooke, it is the very picture I promised to show you a minute ago.’

Olive was overwhelmed by a strange thought. Why should this Mr. Morrison have any special feeling about the story of Dante and Beatrice? Dante had fallen in love with Beatrice when she was a little girl of eight. She sat turning this thought over in her mind, when suddenly, for the first time, she seemed to hear what Mr. Ardrossan had just said, and exclaimed, ‘Were there trees in your picture—ash-trees?’ She asked this because, by an odd freak, her memory abruptly thrust before

her sight something she had never once thought of since the Academy Soirée—the picture she had admired so much and so long, which hung above that bewildering Allerleirauh.

‘Yes, ash-trees to the left—but now I remember, I saw you looking at it. I did not buy it of him; I wanted it, but he begged me to buy a Gresley instead; he said Gresley was broken-hearted because he was not selling—that he had a consumptive wife, and could not give her the comforts she ought to have; in short, he put the matter in such a light, that I was not happy until I had bought the Gresley and paid for it.’

‘But I hope you liked the Gresley?’ said Lady Ellerton.

‘Oh, yes, I liked it: he would not have asked me to buy a bad picture; but I liked Morrison’s own picture a great deal better. He gives his whole mind to his work, and has a mind to give—I wanted that picture terribly.’

‘But, dear Mr. Ardrossan,’ said Lady Ellerton, ‘why do you ever go without a thing you want? You are very different from poor folks like us—you have only to write a cheque.’

‘I only allow myself a certain sum to spend on pleasure,’ said he gravely.

‘But you did get this Mr. Morrison’s picture?’ cried one of the Douglasses.

‘Yes, but not when I wanted it—I had to buy it from a dealer, and he told me what was fine in it, and how “Morrison’s” were sure to rise in the market, and how I had better secure it at that low figure, for Mordew meant to speculate in him next season.’ They smiled at his disgust, and asked to be taken to see the picture.

‘It is in the drawing-room at present. It came while I was away, and has not been hung yet. Morrison would not let me hang it while he was here—he said he wanted to be happy.’

‘I should have thought he might have been very happy to see his work hanging here in such good company,’ observed Lady Ellerton.

‘He thought it too good! Morrison is never satisfied with his pictures—he can only see their faults.’

The drawing-room was devoted to water-colours, and conspicuously beautiful amongst

these was the Turner. It was a view of some town in Switzerland with a river rushing through it and a great lake beyond : there were roofs and watch-towers and many bridges. To those who knew the actual scene, every point in the drawing was verifiable ; but the facts of crowded roofs and streets, of far-off snowy mountains and glittering or reflecting water, had been so harmoniously interwoven, and the transfiguring splendour of sunshine so wonderfully thrown over all, that it was hard to think that any earthly city could be so beautiful, or that the painter had not let his thoughts wander to that apocalyptic city whose gates were of pearl, and whose dividing river was no other than the river of life. The drawing was all gold and russet and pale-gleaming blue, and shone with a soft light of its own. Olive was silently delighted. She read her Ruskin, but she did not know Turner's pictures, and had often wondered if there could, by any possibility, be quite so much in them as Mr. Ruskin would have her believe. The Douglasses, Sir John, and his mother, had looked at it and turned away to admire a sober

Dewint. Sir John observed that the Turner ‘looked very queer!’ Such luxury of colour as that indulged in by Turner in this drawing is for the most part a stumbling-block to ordinary country gentlefolks, who like to see nature depicted in sober greys for high lights, with a few well-put-in black and indigo tints to bring them out.

The Morrison picture was in a corner with its face turned to the wall. ‘He put it there himself,’ said Mr. Ardrossan apologetically. ‘He only left three days ago.’

All crowded round this, so Olive stole away to a little drawing which was hanging near a distant window, for it reminded her of something she had once seen, she knew not when or where. Suddenly she became aware that this was a sketch of a bit of scenery which she once knew by heart. It was the lime-tree at Austerfield under which she and Willie used to meet. There was the gnarled old root on which they always sat. The field was a hilly one, and sloped away down to the stream—the little stream by whose banks they had played so happily. It all looked very small, but every

feature of the place was 'accurately given ; beyond was the wood.

' Pretty little sketch, isn't it ? ' observed Sir John.

Olive's eyes were full of tears—tears for the happy old long-forgotten time. ' Yes, it is pretty,' said she, and to hide her eyes she stooped to look at the back of the drawing. It had been exhibited, and was still labelled, ' No. 4. Austerfield, Yorkshire. William Keithley Morrison, 17, Chaucer Street, N.W.' Olive did not know how he had come by the name of Keithley, but she knew that this was her ' Willie,' as she used to call him so many years ago ; and he had been to Austerfield, and had painted it ! He had sat gazing at the Dante and Beatrice, and had said that it had some peculiar attraction for him. Did he ever think of her ? and what was he like now ?

' Olive dear, how very, very silent you are ! ' said Sir John Ellerton, who was still standing by her.

' I know I am, Don't mind that—I am only thinking. There is so much in this room to make one think.'

Some one called Sir John away to look at something else. The next person who spoke to Olive was Mr. Ardrossan, who said, 'Ah, you have found the little Morrison! It is fine, isn't it? He is a beautiful artist, and he will do better work yet, for, in addition to art-gifts, he has both a heart and a soul.' Olive looked eagerly and inquiringly in Mr. Ardrossan's face; he continued: 'Both are wanted, if you are to do anything great—that always has been my creed, and that always shall be.'

'Then, if you silence the heart——?' said Olive.

'You will soon silence the soul too—by its death.'

'But if you are forced to do it—if circumstances compel you, or you depend on others.'

'No one ought to depend on others when he himself knows what is right!'

'Then, you do not believe in drifting—I mean, in letting others choose your course for you?'

'Certainly not,' he replied. 'It may do for people with neither character nor conscience—the great thing is to be true to yourself.'

‘It is getting late,’ said Lady Ellerton, suddenly checking a conversation which Olive much wished to continue. ‘Olive, I am sure you have enjoyed this; I know I have. Mr. Ardrossan, I am delighted with your pictures.’ Olive looked so much in earnest when she turned to thank Mr. Ardrossan, that he smiled, but his smile was a very kind one.

The carriage was soon ready. He offered his arm to conduct Lady Ellerton to it. Sir John lost no time in securing Olive; he felt that some change had come over her, and was uneasy.

‘Olive dear,’ said he, ‘I did not know you cared so much for pictures. We will buy some for ourselves—you shall choose them.’

Olive said something that was unintelligible, in which the words ‘kind and far too good to me’ occurred very frequently.

‘Are you tired?’ he asked.

‘Yes, a little; I will rest on the way home.’

‘Mr. Ardrossan is a very interesting man,’ observed Lady Ellerton, when they were once more on their way.

‘Very. Most interesting,’ replied Olive, and

then she left the burden of conversation to the Douglasses. She shut her eyes and said no more. She heard those in the carriage with her admiring the rising moon ; she never opened her eyes. She ran past Sir John and the others when they reached the warm shelter of home, hurried to her own room, and threw herself on her bed in an agony of tears.

CHAPTER XVIII.

To thine own self be true ;
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.—*Hamlet.*

‘I CAN’T go on with it!’ she cried; ‘I must tell him all! I thought I could bear it, but it is absolutely impossible!’ Her sobs redoubled. Every feeling of her heart rose up in opposition to the part she was playing! She, who did not love Sir John, had promised to marry him and to spend her whole life with him as his companion. She felt it disgraceful to have consented to such a thing even for a moment! She had pledged herself to a life from which all that sanctified it would be absent. She was promising to be all in all to Sir John, and had no pleasure in his company—no feeling for him beyond languid toleration of his love for herself and a certain amount of gratitude for

his unselfish kindness. How long would that stand the wear and tear of daily life? How many times already during that day had she wished he would get out of her way, and let her hear what Mr. Ardrossan was saying? Mr. Ardrossan's conversation was interesting to her—his character was interesting also; whereas, if she bound herself to live with Sir John Ellerton, hourly, daily, she would have to listen to things she did not want to hear, and either grow like him in mere self-defence, or else be perfectly wretched. It seemed terrible to be his betrothed wife and yet to find herself taking more pleasure in half an hour's conversation with a stranger than she had done in the whole course of her acquaintance with him. Mr. Ardrossan was only an ordinarily well-educated, pleasant man; in London, every time she went out, she would meet men as agreeable as he, and thus be continually obliged to make comparisons to Sir John's disadvantage—and she his wife, too! and perfectly aware that this deficiency in him was no new discovery, for she had seen it from the first, and had accepted him with her eyes open!

But she could not and would not carry this wicked engagement further! She did not love him—she admired a stranger, to whom she had this day spoken almost for the first time in her life, more than the man to whom she was engaged; and the chance sight of a picture of Austerfield, and mention of a poor little boy of ten years old with whom she used to play there ten years ago, had more power to touch her than the presence of the man she was going to marry! All this long day she had felt how wicked she had been to say yes to Sir John the night before. ‘People who have neither character nor conscience may drift, or let others shape their course in life for them—the great thing is to be true to yourself.’ Those were Mr. Ardrossan’s words. Olive would let herself be governed by her conscience—she would be true to herself. However she might cloak the matter over, she was perfectly aware that she had accepted Sir John for his money. She had liked the idea of wealth and position, and of being able to have everything which they would command—her recent life in London made her perfectly able

to compute these advantages. Lady Brooke knew that she was doing this, and thought it right. She had met Olive's, 'But I shouldn't accept him if he were a poor man,' with the answer, 'Of course you would not—no one would wish you to do so.' 'That was the time when I ought to have stopped short,' cried she; 'but I let the shameful thing go on—let her tell him I would accept him—let him put his ring on my finger and kiss me—I am a degraded, horrible girl!—I hate myself!—I accepted a man I did not love, just because he was rich, knowing all the time that I should not have a shadow of a doubt about refusing him if he were poor. It shall not go on a moment longer—I'll say at once that I can't do it.' She half rose; but the thought of his love for her, and his mother's love, and of the shameful confession that she would have to make, checked her, and once more she threw herself down to weep. Her mother's maid came to see if she wanted any little help in dressing. She was startled to see the room nearly dark. There was no light but that which came from the fire. Pearson was a

person of some authority—she came forward and said, ‘Miss Brooke, do you know that it only wants ten minutes to dinner?’

‘I know—at least, I don’t—but I can’t help it; I am not going down—I am tired.’ Olive did so want to keep her grief a secret—for Sir John’s sake, if for no other reason.

‘I am afraid you are not well, ma’am; the long drive——’

‘Yes, that’s it. Leave me alone for a while—I shall soon be well.’

‘But you will have a light?’

‘No light, thank you; my head aches.’

‘But, Miss Brooke, you will stumble over the boxes if you begin to move about in the dark—all your things are packed—all but the one dress I left out for you to-night—I forgot to ask you which, ma’am, so I put out the white one—and oh dear, Miss Brooke—what a pity! You must have been lying on it.’

‘I threw myself down in the dark,’ said Olive: what were white dresses to her! The maid came to remove the dress—she accidentally touched Olive’s hand. ‘You are like a bit of cold ice, miss—and oh dear, what is

the matter? Your fur trimmings are as wet as wet!’ Olive saw that her tears were no longer a secret—the maid smoothed her pillow, put a warm dressing-gown over her, and said she would inform Lady Brooke that she was not well.

‘Don’t send mamma to me!’ cried Olive; ‘promise me not to do that. Go to Lady Ellerton’s room—say I am very tired—that I can’t go down to dinner or eat anything, and that I will lie quietly here—but ask her to come and see me before she goes to bed. Please do exactly as I say.’ Olive had made up her mind to tell Lady Ellerton, and to get her to speak to her mother. Lady Brooke did come for a moment, looked at her kindly enough, and said, ‘You are tired, dear—you are quite right to rest. We shall have a long day to-morrow, I quite dread it—I’ll send you something to eat—Oh, you must eat, whether you are tired or not. All your boxes are packed—so are mine. I shall not be sorry to be back in London. We have had a very nice visit, though.’

And thus she fluttered out, as usual, many

a hundred degrees below the level of what was demanded of her. What a bitter time Olive spent before the arrival of Lady Ellerton! 'Your boxes are all packed:' her mother's words lingered in her mind. There was a ray of comfort in them. She would take her shameful, degraded self out of a house where she had rewarded the extremity of kindness by treacherous deceit; but how terrible it would be to tell Lady Ellerton!

An hour or two passed thus. Some one knocked at Olive's door. Lady Brooke entered. Olive had feared and hoped it was Lady Ellerton. 'Olive, I hope you are feeling better,—you were terribly missed downstairs; Sir John looked quite cut up. I reminded him how soon he would be back in London himself, but I could not make him look happy about it. Olive, if you had refused him, I think it would have killed the poor fellow.'

Olive groaned. She knew that she ought to tell her mother what she was going to do, but was afraid. After a moment's delay, however, she summoned courage and said, 'Mother, I can't let it go on—I don't love him enough.'

‘What nonsense!’ exclaimed Lady Brooke. ‘Every girl feels that when she has accepted a man. I must say good-night, Olive. We start at the ridiculous and horrible hour of eight. Oh, here is Lady Ellerton!’ All chance of further speech with her mother was gone when Lady Ellerton came. She pitied Olive, she kissed her—she scolded her for not eating—she consulted a little with Lady Brooke about her, and together the two ladies left the room. Olive dared not say that she wished to see Lady Ellerton alone—she was afraid of her own mother. She got up and began to write. Pearson returned, but Olive sent her away, and, though her head ached terribly, she wrote. But she could not write—it was easy enough to call herself bad names, but how could she ever express the sorrow she felt for the pain she was giving? She walked backwards and forwards for an hour, and then she thought she might venture to go to Lady Ellerton’s room—there would now be no fear of finding Sir John there. She crept hurriedly along the corridor; she passed her mother’s door; she felt very bitter towards her mother, when she thought how

contemptuously she had dismissed a confession which it had cost her so much to begin. Her dear Aunt Selina would have listened with all the sympathy of a kind heart. She tapped at Lady Ellerton's door. 'Come in, John,' said a pleasant but sleepy voice; and Olive, with her hair hanging low down in disorder, with pale and tear-stained cheeks, turned the handle of the door, but dared not advance beyond the threshold. Lady Ellerton was sitting in her dressing-gown by the fire; she had a book of prayers in her hand, but her reading was all done, and now she was thinking. 'Olive! you here! Dear child, what is it? Are you worse? Are you ill?' said she, when poor, penitent Olive came near her, looking as broken-down and miserable as could be.

Olive threw herself on the floor at her feet, and hid her face on her knee. A fit of crying relieved her, and she said, 'Lady Ellerton, can you listen to me with patience? I have come to say something which will shock you terribly. I am afraid to speak.'

'Speak, dear,' said Lady Ellerton kindly,

but very gravely; her heart misgave her—she seemed to know at once what was coming.

‘I have come to you because I am so miserable,’ said Olive. ‘I cannot go to bed, or wait another moment without telling you that I have’—here she began to cry again, but she went bravely on—‘have behaved very ill to Sir John and you—I have promised more than I can perform. I have said I will be engaged to him and marry him, and I can’t—I must not—I ought not, for I do not love him.’

Lady Ellerton moved uneasily. Olive was afraid that she was going to thrust her away from her. She seized Lady Ellerton’s hand and cried, ‘Please do not hate me. I have tried hard to like him. Mamma said I ought, everyone said it was wrong of me not to do so, and he looked so anxious that I should, and begged so hard, and he is so good and kind, that I have a very great regard for him. I let myself be persuaded—I thought I could engage myself to him and be happy, and that I was sure to love him properly in the end; but I have been thinking all day, and I am not happy, and I don’t think I can be if it goes on—I am

afraid I shall never love him more than I do now, and that makes me miserable! I am wretched whatever I do, for, whether I go on with this or break it off, it must be bad for him.' Sobs and tears interrupted Olive every moment, but she forced herself to continue. Lady Ellerton had not yet spoken. Olive looked up in her face in an agony of distress and anxiety—it was ashen-grey, and so changed. She tried to say something, but could not. She saw the poor girl's terror-stricken and penitent face, and gently laid a hand on hers. 'You have done what is right,' said she at length.

'But you will never forgive me?' sobbed Olive.

'I should have been much more unhappy if you had accepted him. Under the circumstances, you have done what is right.'

'Don't blame me quite so much as I seem to deserve—I have been so hard pressed about this! I wish there was no such thing as money,' she was going to say, but she remembered that she must not accuse her own mother.

‘There has been some great mistake,’ said Lady Ellerton. ‘Both my son and I were informed that you did like him very much, but did not quite love him, and that you came here to strengthen your affection for him, before you finally pledged yourself to be his wife—that was what your mamma gave us to understand in London.’

Olive started. ‘Oh, no,’ she replied. ‘Mamma would not allow me to refuse his offer at once. Lady Ellerton, do not think it unkind of me to say that that was what I wished to do. Mamma said I was to try to love him, and that coming here to Invergrudie meant nothing but being willing to try ; but I think now that I ought to have known that it meant far more. How can I atone to Sir John ? How cruelly, how shamefully he has been treated !’

‘It would have been worse if you had been silent, my poor girl—under the circumstances—when I remember all things—ah, Olive, I should have been a very unhappy woman if you had married my son without loving him ! It would have been the very worst thing that

could have befallen us—thank God, that risk is spared us.’ She seemed to forget Olive’s presence for a minute or two, and to be lost in thought.

Olive was puzzled by her words. ‘Under what circumstances?’ she asked—‘what risk?’

‘Do not ask me—I can’t explain—we must not speak of that. Let us think of poor John.’

‘Yes, let us think of him,’ said Olive very humbly. ‘I am going away in the morning. I hope, when once I am gone, he will not think of me very long.’

‘Ah, my darling,’ said Lady Ellerton, ‘you are one of those whom it is not easy to forget. I shall think of you too, but thank God you have done what is right at last. I don’t think John will give you up, though,’ she added after a pause. ‘From what I know of him, I think he is almost certain to try for some time to make you change your mind. He will try to see you in London.’ Olive looked very anxiously in Lady Ellerton’s face. ‘Promise me,’ said that lady, ‘not to accept him again out of kindness, or for any other

reason but honest liking. If you find hereafter that you can love him, I should rejoice to hear it; but, for God's sake, let us have no more marriages without love.' This speech also bewildered Olive, but she dared make no inquiry. 'Promise, Olive,' repeated the old lady. 'Promise solemnly.'

She gave the required promise.

'Now, my dear, leave me,' said Lady Ellerton sadly. 'I must think of what I have to do—I must speak to my son.'

'Please ask him not to see me, ask him not to try to see me in the morning,' pleaded Olive. 'Tell him how unhappy and ashamed I am when I think of him and of you, and all your kindness; and, Lady Ellerton, do not let him think I have no regard for him at all—please do not.'

Lady Ellerton rose wearily—all her joy was turned to bitterness.

'There is another thing,' said Olive; 'I hardly dare to ask you to do it. Would you tell my mother what has happened—I dare not—dare not do it myself!'

'I will. She and John are talking in the

drawing-room—or were, an hour ago. Ah, Olive, how happy we all were last night—just one day, and what a change!’ Olive crept sorrowfully away.

CHAPTER XIX.

Who is't can say, I'm at the worst?—*King Lear*.

O, speak no more :

These words like daggers enter in my ears.—*Hamlet*.

‘It’s half-past six, Miss Brooke! Breakfast will be on the table in an hour’s time.’

Olive rubbed her eyes. Much as those eyes had wept, they had been sealed in sleep. She rose. Her boxes were standing ready packed for departure in a corner of the room, with the ill-treated white silk dress of the evening before now neatly folded and lying at the top of one of them. She was going to leave Invergrudie; perhaps, when she was many hundreds of miles away, she might shake off some of the weight of remorse by which she was now overborne. She did not wish to be freed from the entire burden; she had done something which ought never to be forgotten. She dressed herself, and

then sat down and wrote three or four lines of passionate affection and regret to Lady Ellerton, folded her note carefully, and enclosed the ring Sir John had given her such a short while ago; and now all was over, and she was ready to leave the house in which she had been so kindly entertained.

‘Are you nearly ready, Olive?’ asked Lady Brooke, half opening the door, and peeping in. Olive trembled in every limb. ‘Oh yes, I see you are; but be sure to make Pearson leave out plenty of wraps for the journey: it is so cold, you are certain to want them.’

Olive was sitting in a part of the room which did not command a view of the door. She dared not turn and meet her mother’s eye, but, happening to look in the direction of a large looking-glass, she caught sight of Lady Brooke, and saw that her own face was being scanned by her mother with the utmost minuteness. The instant Lady Brooke saw that she was observed she dropped her eyes and said, ‘You had better come down to breakfast, Olive; there is no time to lose.’

‘I don’t think I can take any; I am not hungry.’

‘Shall I send it upstairs to you, dear?’

Olive began to think her mother did not know yet. Lady Brooke went away, and soon came a cup of tea and some food for Olive—she swallowed it, though it seemed to choke her. People came and did things to her boxes. She hardly noticed their presence; she did not know how long it was before she was summoned—the carriage was at the door. It was time to go. She held her note to Lady Ellerton tightly in her hand, and went downstairs. Lady Ellerton was standing in the hall. She looked very pale, and tall, and dignified, and under great restraint, but still kind. Olive came mutely towards her and held out her note.

‘Will you read it?’ she asked, with humbly downcast eyes.

‘Yes, dear,’ was Lady Ellerton’s answer; but as she kissed Olive, she said, ‘I saw your mother last night: I told her.’ And now Olive became aware that Sir John was putting Lady Brooke into the carriage. Soon he came to her. ‘Good-bye, Miss Brooke,’ said he.

Olive did not know how he looked, she dared not raise her eyes to his face. 'Sir John!' she faltered, and burst into tears.

'Don't do that,' he said in a low voice. 'I will do my best either to win you or bear to live without you.' No more was said; he put her into the carriage by Lady Brooke's side, the door was shut, and they drove away.

For a long time Olive forgot her mother and all fear of her. She gave way to very bitter but silent grief. At last she was conscious of Lady Brooke's presence. That lady, dressed in the warmest of warm travelling-dresses, was sitting looking perfectly composed and comfortable, with eyes turned towards the window. It was a fine morning. The sun, a very wintry one, shone pleasantly enough on the crags, precipices, and bleak mountain-sides past which they were making their way; a few fleeting snow-flakes danced about in its light. The nearest railway-station was ten miles off. Had Lady Brooke developed a sudden taste for wild scenery?—her eyes never strayed from the window. The view certainly was magnificent,

but somewhat eerie. They were passing through a gorge in the mountain; it was so narrow that there was no room for anything but the road on which they were driving, and deep down below was a ghastly precipice. The ground was rather slippery and sometimes thickly covered with snow, but Olive had no thought of fear; if the carriage did go down with her, it was no more than she deserved. How odd it was that Lady Brooke uttered no reproaches! They at length reached the railway-station, took their places in the train, and Olive watched the Ellertons' carriage as it turned round and slowly drove away—the last slender link between herself and them was now broken. As the carriage finally disappeared behind a high bank, Olive could not help casting a very troubled glance on her mother. Lady Brooke showed no signs of trouble: she was not thinking of that or of anything, but how to make this railway-carriage, in which she was obliged to pass so many hours, as comfortable as she could. Olive watched her pushing hot-water tins about and spreading out warm rugs. She roused herself and lent a

helping hand to these manifold arrangements, wondering much as she did so why her mother refrained from speaking of what had happened, and half wishing she would say her worst and get it over. When all was smoothly spread and warmly placed, Lady Brooke turned to Olive and said, ‘Well, Olive, poor Lady Ellerton made me promise to say nothing to you about what has occurred; and so long as I was in her house, or in her carriage, I have thought it right to keep my word: but now, the sooner I tell you what I think of you the better. I must say you have contrived to bring our visit to Scotland to a very unpleasant conclusion!’

‘I know it! I feel it! You can’t blame me more than I blame myself.’

‘I can’t imagine how you could behave so ill. We have stayed ten weeks, or perhaps longer, in these people’s house; they have been angels to us, and we have gone away after making them as wretched as it was in our power to do!’

‘You know I never wished to come to Scotland!’ said Olive, plucking up a spirit; ‘and

you know you said that coming here bound me to nothing—that it was an understood thing that it did not.’

‘If I did say so, it was only because I thought you were sure to get fond of him; I said it for your good. Your own sense must tell you that to stay ten weeks in a man’s house, letting him get more and more attached to you daily, and then to turn round and say that you can never love him, is horribly cruel conduct!’

‘I think you more to blame than I,’ cried Olive in desperation. ‘You know about these things and I do not; my instinct was to stay away from his house, you insisted on my going. Why did you do that?’

‘Does it occur to you that you are not quite respectful to your father’s wife?’ observed that lady.

‘What an odd way of putting it!’ thought Olive, who was so bitter with Lady Brooke that, for once, she could be critical with regard to her. ‘Why does she not say mother?’—‘Mamma,’ she said, ‘I am sorry if I am not respectful to you, but I am so shocked at what

has happened ! It is terrible ! I can't bear to think of it—what shall I do ?'

'Honestly speaking, Olive, I don't think you *can* do anything now but take him.'

Olive shook her head.

'Then, if you won't take him, what do you mean to do ?'

'Nothing !—Let things go on as they were before he wrote to me—oh, how I do wish he never had done so !'

'That is all very fine !' exclaimed Lady Brooke. 'I can quite understand that you are perfectly content to return to the life you led last spring—and no wonder ; you had as happy a time of it as any girl in London ! No girl, no matter what her position or rank may be, could have had much more comfort and enjoyment than you had—but I told you it was not going to last for ever. Pray do me the justice to remember that.'

'I know Aunt Ullathorne will want her house.'

'That's not all—besides, girls must marry when they can—they have only a certain number of chances : you have had one which is

unexceptionable. He is well-born, rich, handsome, fond of you, and good. What do you want more?’

‘The fault is in me—I do not love him.’

‘Whom do you love, then?’ cried Lady Brooke, with a sudden flash of consciousness that Olive’s answer might supply an excellent reason for what was otherwise entirely inexplicable—that her conduct might, in reality, be all that could be desired.

‘No one. How can you ask such a question? I love no one.’

Lady Brooke did not quite believe her, and said, ‘Have you any reason to expect an offer from Mr. Ardrossan?’

Olive blushed to the very tips of her fingers, but it was with fierce burning indignation. ‘Would that excuse what I have done?’ she asked very bitterly.

‘Yes, no doubt—at any rate, it would help to make it intelligible.’

‘Then if it would be right to refuse Sir John for the sake of a richer man, there can certainly be no harm in refusing him because I do not love him.’

‘Refusing him for the sake of Mr. Ardrossan is a reason—refusing him for no reason at all is the greatest piece of stupidity I ever heard of; but that, it seems, is what you are doing;’ and so saying, Lady Brooke coldly and indignantly turned away to look at the snow which was now falling heavily, but she soon turned back to watch Olive. Olive did not speak—she felt it was in vain to try to make her mother understand her motives, and she was weary with the struggle and emotion of the night before. Lady Brooke watched her for some time in silence, and then said with a sneer, ‘You think you can’t make me understand your lofty motives, but you are perhaps mistaken. I perfectly understand that, for no reason whatever worth listening to, you have refused a kind, affectionate husband and a happy home; what I want to understand is, what ideas you have with regard to the future—what do you propose to do? Do you mind telling me?’

‘What do you mean?’ cried Olive. ‘Why am I to do anything? I have never thought of that—girls who have a father and mother

do not settle what they are going to do—all thinking of that kind is done for them.’

‘That is undoubtedly a very safe method of looking at things when you have a father and mother; but, Olive, that is not the case with you, I am sorry to say—you think I am your mother, but I am not!’

While saying this, Lady Brooke did not spare Olive one glance of her pitiless eyes. She stared steadily in her face to see how she bore this most unexpected blow. The suddenness of the thrust stunned her. ‘Not my mother?’ she gasped. ‘What can you mean?’

But all Lady Brooke said was, ‘No, I am not your mother.’

The calmness and indifference of her manner, which to Olive’s mind added so appreciably to the cruelty of her conduct, did something towards restoring the poor girl to herself. As soon as she was sufficiently recovered from the shock to think at all, she became aware that she had never loved her so-called mother, and, little by little, this piece of intelligence came almost as a relief to her. ‘At any rate, I have a father,’ said she, after a painful silence; ‘he

will say what he wishes me to do, and I will obey him.'

'Do you mean that you will accept Sir John if he bids you?'

'Say no more about Sir John,' cried Olive in impatient despair—'that is done with! I mean, I will go where my father bids me go, and spend my life as he wishes me to spend it.'

'He won't wish to have you with him—that is quite certain,' said Lady Brooke, 'for he dreads seeing you.'

This was too much for Olive: she burst into an agonised fit of crying. 'Tell me why,' she gasped. 'What have I done? Why should he not wish to see me?'

'Because you are the child of a very bad, wicked woman, who behaved so disgracefully that he was obliged to get a divorce from her. Her misconduct nearly killed him—he has never got over it. That is why you have been kept away from him so long—it would be terribly painful to him to see you—he is unhappy enough about you as it is—he dreads how you may turn out; his one great anxiety is to see you safely married.'

Clank, clank, went the noisy train, as, with no thought of anything but its own iron self, it hurried on past moor and strath and lonely cottages, and Lady Brooke cut her way through Olive's heart just as ruthlessly. She talked, and perhaps Olive heard—she made no answer—this horrible and cruel disclosure had utterly overwhelmed her. She knew that it was true—it explained Lady Brooke's manner to her, and many other things; looks and speeches, which had often seemed so strange to her, were all intelligible now. 'Do the Ellertons know this?' she at length asked very humbly, for Lady Ellerton had said one or two things the night before, which she had not understood at the time, but which she now thought seemed to point to such knowledge.

'Of course they do! Everyone knows it. Such things are no secret—they are in all the newspapers—trials always are! People do not come and talk to you about it, but they think of it whenever they see you.'

'You ought to have kept me out of sight, then,' wailed Olive; 'you ought not to have taken me to balls and parties and places

where people are. Ah—I remember now, that was what the lady at the Drawing-room meant. Why did you let people see me?’

‘That was our kindness to you; don’t blame us for that! We did not want to let you be crushed by this—we wanted to give you a chance of doing well—of marrying some one of good position who could afford to defy the world, and make you happy.’

‘Why should the world say anything about me?’ cried Olive, haughtily. ‘I have done no harm!’

‘Perhaps not; but, rightly or wrongly, the world is very shy of girls whose mothers have been divorced. These things run in the character. You won’t find many men so ready to overlook the disadvantages of your birth as poor despised Sir John Ellerton. It was a long time before Lady Ellerton could tolerate the idea of having you for a daughter-in-law, I can assure you!’

How Olive’s life was changing! When she left Invergrudie she thought herself the most miserable girl in existence, but she was happy

then by comparison with what she was now. She sighed very heavily.

‘You must make the best of a bad position, Olive; there is nothing else to be done. I think you will now see that you had better change your mind about Sir John: you will never have a better offer—your father was delighted when he heard of it. It seems to lift you out of disgrace at once and for ever. Accept him, and then I can bring your sisters home.’

‘Do you mean to say that you are keeping them away because of me?’ cried poor Olive, in renewed distress.

‘Yes, it is a disadvantage to them. As long as you are unmarried the horrible story is raked up and talked about every time your name is mentioned; if you were once married, there would be a chance of people forgetting it.’

‘Then,’ said Olive very drearily, ‘I have, so to speak, no home?’

‘Oh, yes, you have! Both your father and I are most anxious to do our duty by you. You ought to do yours to us. If you choose,

you can now put an end to the greatest sorrow of our lives, and yet you do not intend to do it.' This was said tentatively. Lady Brooke was very anxious to know the effect of her words, but Olive did not seem to notice them.

'Uncle Richard and Aunt Selina are my real father and mother,' she cried, in great agony. 'Let me go to them—I entreat you to let me go.'

'My dear, I advise you to keep away from your Uncle Richard and your Aunt Selina, with your troubles; if all accounts be true, they have quite enough of their own!'

'I know uncle is not quite so well—but I may go to them—they will take me in, I am sure.'

'If your uncle's illness continues long, it will be quite as much as he can do to keep himself.'

'I will help them—I will work like a servant for them.'

'You forget that they have girls too! I dare say your uncle's true reason for sending them to school at Brighton was your being in Harley Street.'

‘But what am I to do, then? I am not to go to Uncle Richard, and you and papa do not want me in India.’

‘That is just the very question which I want you to take into consideration; not that I should have any objection to have you in India with us—it is your father—I am sure he could not bear it! We hoped that you would use the splendid chances which have been given you and marry. If you do not wish to do that, you must be content to be somewhat of a burden to your friends!’

Olive groaned. Her mother’s disgrace cut her to the heart. She sank down in a corner of the carriage, and seemed to abandon herself to despair.

‘Let me settle what you had better do,’ cried Lady Brooke. ‘Here in this bag I have pens, ink, and paper. Sit up, my poor child, and write one kind word to Sir John Ellerton who loves you. The merest scrawl will do—you can’t write much in a shaking railway-carriage. We will have it posted at the next station. That will end all our troubles. It will make him happy, and you happy, and

give the greatest possible delight to your poor father. He will be a new man when he hears of it, and will, I know, set off to England to see you. Come, Olive dear, here is all you want, ready for you—be quick.'

Olive quivered in every nerve, but she did not move to obey, nor did she speak.

'Olive, dear, don't you hear me?' said Lady Brooke, raising her voice and repeating her words lest the noise should have drowned them. But words seemed to have lost their power over Olive. She was huddled up in a corner, in a stupor of grief, from which there was no rousing her. Once more Lady Brooke pleaded with her, but in vain; and seeing this, she carefully replaced her writing materials in her most luxurious travelling-bag. Only for the time, though—that was her hope. 'What a long time the next station is in coming!' thought she; 'and there is no seeing out of the window now that so much of that tiresome snow is falling. And how dark it makes it! I can scarcely read.' Not that she wanted to read just then. It was two o'clock, and she had been travelling for six hours. She was

hungry. Besides, she was rather distressed about Olive's grief. 'Come, Olive,' she said at length, 'don't take this so terribly to heart! Many a girl has far worse things than this to bear.'

No answer came from the prostrate Olive. Lady Brooke began to be rather uncomfortable about her, but she soon shook off that feeling. 'After all,' she thought, 'I have done her a great kindness. She will fret a little longer, and then she will ask me to write to the Ellertons for her. No one could have managed her better than I have done.' She opened her case of sandwiches, and placed her silver flask of sherry within reach. 'You must take a sandwich, dear,' she said, and gently tried to make Olive sit up. But Olive refused all food, and when Lady Brooke saw there was a risk of provoking a fresh burst of sorrow if she persisted in her entreaties, she left her in peace. She leisurely enjoyed the sandwiches, and as Olive did not seem inclined to take any, she all but finished them, likewise the sherry; and just as she had done that, the train, with much grinding of machinery, entered a station. 'Oh, please, not in here!' cried Lady Brooke to a

burly guard who was trying to find a place for some one. He partly opened the door, said the train was very full, and did not seem disposed to go elsewhere. A gentleman pressed closely behind him, warmly cloaked and thickly sprinkled with snow. Lady Brooke shivered at the sight of it.

‘Not in here, I beg,’ she again said. ‘I have an invalid here—the gentleman might not like to get in if he knew—she is just recovering from an illness—a fever.’

A glance at Olive, who, white as a sheet, lay back with closed eyes in the corner, quickly drove the intruder away. ‘It was an artist,’ thought Lady Brooke. ‘Oh, I *am* glad that I kept him out! I am sure he is an artist, by those sticks.’

She called to a porter and demanded fresh hot-water tins, and then slowly and carefully made herself ready for sleep, for the train would not reach Edinburgh till ten o’clock that night.

CHAPTER XX.

Hamlet. The air bites shrewdly : it is very cold.

Horatio. It is a nipping and an eager air.—*Hamlet.*

LADY BROOKE awoke suddenly : she had been dreaming that she was in the steamboat on her way back to India, and as soon as she was sufficiently awake to be able to think, she knew why she had dreamed this—the train was moving with a strange undulating motion, something like the rising and falling of waves. This, however, only occurred occasionally ; then it went on again as before, but there was no sound of wheels. Once or twice, it seemed to meet with some obstacle which checked it altogether ; but after stopping a minute or so, it once more made its way onwards. ‘I suppose,’ thought she, after puzzling herself to know what this could mean, ‘they want to stop at some station, and are not slackening speed

properly. If we stay here long enough, I'll get out for a minute or two, and walk up and down. I feel quite stiff with sitting so long in one position, and the cold is intolerable!—I never in my life felt anything like it!' She lay back listening to the wind, and waiting till the train stopped and she could do this. It was not long before it did stop, and then she opened the window, at the same time dislodging a thick covering of snow which had built itself up outside.

'No wonder I could see nothing!' she exclaimed; but the moment the window was open, a chill blast of wind drove a volley of glass-like grains of snow in her face. In spite of the pain of this, she again tried to look out, but could see no platform. Nothing, indeed, was to be seen but snow, and that very obscurely, for it was now perfectly dark.

'How stupid of them to stop the train before they had got all the carriages into the station! I did so want to walk about awhile. What can they mean by being so tiresome? Guard! Guard! Porter!' cried she; but no one came, and another cutting blast drove her

back, and brought so much snow with it that she was glad to shut the window. It was five o'clock, she could just see that by the poor light of the lamp. Five hours more before they could reach Edinburgh! 'Olive, are you awake?' she cried. 'Do answer—you make me very anxious! It is dreadful to be shut up in the dark with a person who won't answer when she is spoken to!'

Olive made some reply between a gasp and a groan, which did not seem to promise much conversational enjoyment, so Lady Brooke left her alone again—put some *eau-de-Cologne* on her own forehead, and threw herself back, exclaiming, 'Five long hours more of this! What a great deal I have gone through for the sake of that girl in the corner!—but I certainly did not bargain for a wretched journey like this! And I do believe these natives enjoy it,' for she saw obscure forms moving about outside. 'I should have thought by far the best thing they could do would be to hurry on and get out of this uncomfortable country. Five hours more! It will be midnight before we get to bed, and to-morrow we have another

long railway journey before us! Perhaps it would be better to wait in Edinburgh until Sir John Ellerton comes. We might do that. As Olive was not able to write her letter, I will telegraph to him when we get there. She is sure to be willing to let me do that—more than willing, I should say—glad. Let me see: I might use this time that we are in the station to compose my telegram to him. They only allow twenty words, and I am sure, if this cold goes on increasing, I shall not be able to do it afterwards. Twenty words, addresses free. Miss Brooke—no, I'll say Lady Brooke, Lockhart's Hotel, Edinburgh, to Sir John Ellerton, Bart., Invergrudie. "Join us here, if you can, if only for a day. Both of us are anxious to see you." Nineteen words. What a clever woman I am! I did that without one bit of counting—just by instinct. I'll have my twenty words, though—what shall I say? "Both of us are *extremely* anxious to see you." How the poor dear silly man will hurry off to see us!'

Just as Lady Brooke had got so far, she became aware that some one was trying to rub

the snow off the window on her side—it was covered again already.

‘I’ll open the window,’ cried she.

‘For God’s sake, keep the winda steikit, leddies,’ cried the man outside, ‘or the snaw will fill up the coach and snoor ye! Dinna be frichted, leddies, but I’m fearin we shall hae to bide here for twa—three hours longer. We’re clean brocht up wi’ the snaw! It’s an awfu’ nicht! But there is naething to fear.’

Lady Brooke wondered what all this gibberish meant. She partly grasped that the train was stopped by the snow, and, as she had no idea of being in bondage to circumstances, she cried, ‘Make it go on, please; I must be in Edinburgh to-night. Is it the engine?’

‘Leddies, we canna gang ae fit further, dae what we wull!’

‘But if we have pushed our way so long, can’t we go on pushing it?’ said she very impatiently.

‘Na, na, the snaw’s just like a deid wa’ forenenst us! We’ve been warstling our way through it for some time, but we canna gang

further till we're howkit out.' So saying, the man began to go.

'It's no use to go away until you have told me what you are doing to get us out! I can't stay here—I never felt so cold in the whole course of my life!'

'Ma faith, leddy, we wadna bide here if we had our wull, I can tell ye! We're a' as keen to get hame as onybody can be.' He saw her preparing to say more, but was impatient to get on to the other carriages, and said, 'Ye'd better steik the winda, and the ventilator at the ither side o' the coach maun be steikit an' a'—the drift's o' that side, ye see. God be aboot us, but it's an awfu' nicht!' Then he went.

Olive was on the windward side: for some time she had been uncomfortably aware that fine sand-like snow was forcing its way in through every crack and crevice. Her head had been partly resting against one of the side windows. She tried to move, and found that her hair was tightly frozen to the glass. She tore herself loose and closed the ventilator. The window itself was completely blocked up. There was not nearly so much snow on the

window by which Lady Brooke was sitting, but even when it was entirely cleared, the evening was so wild and dark that they could see nothing. Not a star was visible—no light whatever to be seen but that which proceeded from the snow itself—a shrill wind was raging. Inside, the feeble oil lamp provided by the Railway Company did but little to dispel the gloom. Its light was a mere spark, and even that often seemed about to die away altogether.

‘I wish we were not so entirely alone,’ wailed Lady Brooke. ‘It seems dreadfully cruel to leave two poor women alone on such a night as this ! If they do not dig the train out soon, the carriages will be covered, and then we shall be suffocated. Perhaps all the other passengers have got away to some safe place, and just because we have no gentleman with us, we are left forgotten here !’ Thus Lady Brooke lamented unceasingly. The darkness and horrible loneliness alarmed her, and then, worse than all, there was the danger of another train coming and running into theirs, and cutting them all to pieces. When she thought of this, her agony became so excessive, that

even Olive pitied and became strong to comfort her. Their situation really was very pitiable, for the icy cold wind found its way into their comfortless place of refuge and chilled them to the bone. Neither of them knew how much time had passed by, when they once more heard some one outside. Regardless of cold and wind, Lady Brooke hurried to the window to try to open it, but her hands trembled so that they would hardly serve her. At last it slid heavily down, leaving an opening of a few inches.

‘Madam,’ said a gentleman with a remarkably pleasant voice, ‘I have come to offer my services to you. I think, when I was about to get into your carriage a short while since, you said that you had charge of an invalid. This unfortunate detention must be a great inconvenience to you!’

‘Great! It is terrible! You have come to offer your services, you say; but what can you do for us, unless you can get us out?’

‘I wish I could get you out, but there is nothing for it now but sitting still. I could fill your hot-water tin,’ said he; ‘that was what I

thought of doing. The water in the boiler is still warm.'

'You would do us an infinitely greater service if you would explain to us what has happened, and give us some hope of getting away. But don't stand outside there in the storm. Come in and stay with us awhile. It is terrible to be alone here, knowing nothing!'

The stranger had a pass-key. He was entirely wrapped in a large piece of waterproof which had come out of the van. He opened and shut the door as quickly as he could, but was still not quick enough to keep out all the snow. 'Bad as it is here, it is better on this side than on the other,' said he cheerfully. 'If I had opened the other door, we should never have got it shut again! The carriage would have been choked up in a moment!'

'Why worse on this side?' inquired Olive.

'The wind blows from that quarter. It is the wind which is our enemy, not the snow. There is no snow to hurt us if the wind had not got up so suddenly.'

'But it is snowing,' said Lady Brooke; 'I felt it.'

‘Oh no, excuse me, no snow is falling now—a great deal fell this morning, and the wind is terribly strong, and sweeps it off the high land above us with such force that hollows like this cutting are filled up directly—you have no idea of its strength. It is one incessant blast of wind, laden with icy grains of snow.—Don’t you feel how they force their way in everywhere? You have very wisely closed the ventilator, but still it is coming in!’

‘I felt it,’ said Lady Brooke; ‘it dashed against my face just like sand in the desert. I have lately returned from India, so you may imagine how I suffer! No one here can feel the cold as I do; but now, please, let me know how long we shall have to stay in this horrible place?’

This was just what he was unable to do; he made some answer, weak as regarded information, but strong in hope. The guard had gone to make their situation known—he would soon return with a train full of provisions, and a gang of plate-layers—all would be right when once they came. ‘Are you very cold?’

he said, turning to Olive; he remembered that she was ill, and pitied her.

‘Yes, rather, thank you; but I am well wrapped up.’

‘Perhaps there is a fire to which we could go?’ suggested Lady Brooke. ‘They must have a fire for the engine.’

‘That, I am sorry to say, was damped out long ago! One or two of the passengers were trying to light a fire in one of the vans, but I don’t believe it will be of any use—it will only fill the van with smoke. There is no danger!’ cried he, for he saw Lady Brooke was alarmed at this. ‘They have put a little fuel in an iron bucket—that’s all; it can’t set anything on fire.’

‘Oh, but there is another thing!’ cried she, in renewed terror; ‘I have quite forgotten to ask you about the danger of a collision. I am terribly afraid of that!’

‘Indeed, there is no danger,’ he replied. ‘Not the very least. The time for alarm is over!’

‘Then we were in danger!’ cried she, ‘and no one told us!’

‘No one knew but the guard and railway-servants. They did not tell us—a great many lives would have been lost in the snow if they had! I only heard of their anxiety when it was over.’

‘I don’t believe it is over! Why should I? People never tell the truth on these occasions! I will not sit here to be cut to pieces—they shall not force me to do it!’ and so saying, she began to open the window.

He restrained her. ‘Madam, be reasonable; I will tell you exactly what amount of danger there was, and then you will trust me when I tell you there is none now.’

Lady Brooke’s face showed only a limited degree of confidence. The stranger proceeded. ‘I dare say you noticed that our train went very unsteadily for some time before it actually stopped—it went up and down, as if it were passing over mounds of earth.’ Lady Brooke nodded and said she had been asleep most of the afternoon, but still at one time she had felt this, and it was like going over waves.

‘Those were smaller snow-drifts, and we pushed our way through them, but the cutting

was low then, and they were low in proportion ; afterwards, when the cutting was deeper, the snow of course was deeper too, and we pushed it up like a great wall in front of us, but it soon choked up the engine.'

'Yes, I know all that,' said Lady Brooke impatiently. 'The guard told me that.'

'Not the guard. He did not waste a moment in speaking to anyone. He just gave the train and passengers in charge to the driver, caught up some fog-signals and his red lamp, and ran off to protect his train.'

'I knew there was danger!' cried Lady Brooke, much excited.

'Yes, but it's over,' said he. 'Let me tell you the whole amount of it. He, I believe, had been in a great fright for some time before our train was blocked up, lest a heavy mineral train, which would leave Blair Angus station five minutes after we did, should overtake and run into us. The danger was great then, for we had lost much time in cutting through the drifts—we were late, and the mineral train would come quicker than we did, for it would get the benefit of the track our wheels had cut

—though that, to be sure, fills fast. Besides, a mineral train is so much heavier, it pushes its way with more force. The guard knew all this, but he did the only thing in his power to save us—he went off through the snow at once and stopped the other train. The danger was over before any of us even imagined that it existed. I assure you this is true.’

‘You may be mistaken. He may never have got up to this mineral train. It may still come—or if not, something else may. Don’t ask me to stay here in a carriage at the very end of the train, just because I am told there is no danger!’ So saying, she rose, and began to consider what she would take with her.

‘Indeed, you had better stay; if the mineral train had been coming, it would have been here more than an hour ago; and if it is stopped behind us, nothing else can come—that is simply impossible!’

‘I do not mean to run any risk,’ said she. ‘Can I not be taken to a carriage quite at the other end of the train? You came to offer to help me—will you help me in the way I wish?’

‘Of course I will, but you will get very wet. The snow is up to my waist.’

‘But I can slip along that board the guard stands on when he comes.’

‘Yes, but each carriage is separated from the other by quite a high wall of snow which has blown through between them—however, if you wish it, I will take you, though indeed you had better stay here.’

‘If I wish it!’ cried Lady Brooke almost angrily.

‘Then I am at your service; but please, ladies, do not ask me to take both of you at once. I will take you, madam, now, and then return for your daughter.’ Olive raised a listless head. She said she was not afraid, and would prefer to stay where she was.

‘You are right,’ he replied; ‘you have no idea what it is outside, and you have been ill.’

‘I will come back to you, dear, after a while,’ said Lady Brooke. ‘Perhaps you are right to stay here, but I should not know a moment’s peace if I did. I can send Pearson to stay with you. This gentleman will no doubt be kind enough to bring her here.’

‘Oh, no, leave poor Pearson where she is ; she has a very bad cold : don’t bring her out.’

‘I will go to a carriage with other people in it,’ said Lady Brooke, preparing to depart without more ado. ‘It is so miserable to be alone!’

He thought her selfishness stupendous ! She was seeking what she believed to be safety, and leaving her invalid daughter to be killed. She remembered that she herself did not like to be alone, but never once thought of her poor pale daughter, whom she was deserting without any consideration as to what her feeling about solitude might be !

‘I don’t mind waiting here, while you go and pick out a suitable carriage for me—we should get very wet if we had to spend much time in seeking one,’ said Lady Brooke.

‘I might not be able to come back,’ he answered, determined not to be her victim to this extent. Together they went. He had rather a satisfaction in knowing that, in spite of all his exertions to protect her, and her own to protect herself, she must have got very wet. He then went to look for Pearson. He was

resolved to do that, for he was very sorry for the poor girl whom he had just left. She was evidently not so selfish as her mother. He did not succeed in finding Pearson, and at last the extreme violence of the storm drove him back to his own carriage; but he could not forget Olive's face of suffering, and after an hour or so he resolved to return to the carriage where she was now spending these hours of darkness alone. He hastily caught up two or three things likely to be useful, and, difficult as the short journey was, made his way back to her. She was sitting with her head bent down, just as he had left her. He opened the door quickly, got in, closed it, and then said, 'I have come to see if you have changed your mind about staying here alone, and would like me to escort you to your mother?'

The thought of going to her mother brought no consolation to poor Olive; she had no mother to whom she could fly for comfort. 'I'll stay here,' she replied; 'unless you think I ought to go.'

'It is for you to judge,' said he; 'it is a terrible night for you to be here alone. The

mere thought of what you might be suffering has made me anxious. I have been trying to find your maid, but have not succeeded.'

'Oh, thank you. You still think it quite safe to stay here? I mean, that there is no fear of a collision?'

'None whatever! The train which was to have followed us has either been stopped by the guard, or snowed up.'

'Thank you,' said Olive simply. 'Then, I'll stay here.'

He liked her trustful manner. How very ill she looked! 'I am afraid this is a great trial to you,' said he kindly. 'You have been ill.'

'No, I have not been ill—do not be anxious about me.'

How odd! had that fever been invented to keep him out of the carriage? 'I understood the lady who was with you—your mother, I presume?—to say that you were just recovering from a fever.' He said this with great hesitation.

'You have made some mistake,' said Olive, who had not heard Lady Brooke make this

statement. 'I have had no fever, no illness of any kind. I do feel ill now, but it is only fatigue, and perhaps I am hungry,' she added, for she now remembered that she had not eaten anything since a little before eight in the morning, when she had left Invergrudie. It seemed years since she had been there. He began to unfasten a case which he had brought with him, and said, 'I am going to make you a cup of tea. I will have it ready directly. You see, I am a vagrant by profession, and have to be independent of other folks.'

She watched him unpacking his cooking apparatus, and was soothed by the sight of his dexterous little arrangements. It went into a very small compass. He had everything he wanted but water, and one plunge of the small kettle into the snow soon supplied him with materials for that. He had some sandwiches and biscuits, and these he set before her. The tea was delicious, and refreshed her. She made him share the food. 'It really is very kind of you to give me this,' said she. 'I have not had anything to eat since early morning. What a dreadful day this has been!'

She was thinking of all that she had suffered, but he misunderstood her meaning, and replied: 'Scotland is a splendid wild country, but, like all wild creatures, it is apt to turn and rend you when you least expect it. I ought to have gone home three weeks ago, but stayed on to see more of its winter aspect; I did not, however, expect to be caught in this way!'

'How long shall we really have to stay here do you think?'

'Oh, that depends on how long it is before help can be sent to us. The guard would make our situation known at Blair Angus, and they would soon organise a relief train; but when we get out, depends on how many other trains have to be cut out between us and that place. Don't think about it. Will you allow me to arrange your rugs a little better for you? and then do please try to forget where you are.'

He shook off the snow which had forced its way in; he hung up one rug between her and the window, to keep out this intrusive drift. He brought her to the side where Lady Brooke had been sitting—that lady always did secure

the best of everything—and then, with this fresh arrangement, and after some food, she felt considerably better, though a heavy heart-ache still remained. He saw that she was very unhappy, and tried to make her forget all the miseries of her situation, for to these he naturally attributed her dejection. He talked for some time on any subject which came uppermost—anything to make her look less sad. At first her answers were very short and sparing, but gradually he succeeded in arousing her attention a little, and at last she even appeared to take a faint pleasure in his conversation, but he never detected the slightest trace of a smile on her face.

‘It is very irritating,’ said he, after about an hour had passed in this way, ‘to be suffering thus from one of Nature’s fiercest ill-tempers, and get no good from it! This is nothing but a very sulky, ugly storm.’

‘How do we get good from Nature’s ill-tempers?’ asked Olive. ‘They can never do us anything but harm, can they?’

‘I am detected talking shop,’ he replied gaily. ‘I am a painter—a landscape-painter—

and my greatest delight, as well as profit, is to watch a really fine storm. I would walk twenty miles for the chance of doing that ; but this has all the dangers and discomforts of a grand one, and is nothing but a savagely fierce wind sweeping the snow off the moors.'

He was a landscape-painter ! Olive looked earnestly at him ; before, she had only been incidentally aware that he was tall, young, and handsome. She had thought of his kindness, not of his looks. But he was a landscape-painter ! She could not see very well, but she thought his hair was dark and curly, his eyes seemed very bright and kindly, and somewhat meditative ; he wore a dark beard, and had a very pleasant voice. His hands were small and shapely. She had just seen how deft they were. Her heart gave a great leap and stood still. Had she sat for hours with that hand in hers, had she looked into those eyes for all the joy of her life some ten years ago, and had she kissed those lips ? Was it, could it be, her old playfellow Willie ?

CHAPTER XXI.

She gave me eyes, she gave me ears ;
And humble care and delicate fears ;
A heart the fountain of sweet tears,
And love, and thought, and joy.—WORDSWORTH.

OLIVE dared not trust herself to speak. She felt that her voice would betray her. If, by any chance, this stranger should turn out to be the much-loved companion of her childhood, and if he were half as nice to her as of old, she had at any rate a brother now when she was so very miserable. Never in her life had she been so wretched as to-day. Perhaps that was why he was going to be given back to her. Heaven was kind, and had sent her help in her extreme need ! She did not speak. She was watching each movement, perusing each feature, and wondering whether this could possibly be he. He had left Mr. Ardrossan's only a few days before, so it was not so utterly unlikely as at

first sight appeared. He observed the change in her manner, thought she was becoming unhappy again, and said, 'Try to forget about this storm. Shall I go away? Shall I try to find your mother, or your maid? Perhaps you would like to go to sleep? I wish you could do that, and just wake up again to find the train cut out, and yourself on your way home.'

The storm was raging as loudly as ever, but Olive neither heard nor thought about it—for the moment, too, she had forgotten that she had no home. 'Oh, please do not go away,' cried she. 'There is something I so much wish to ask you. Do you know Mr. Ardrossan?'

'Yes, I know him,' he replied with some surprise. 'I have just been staying with him. I left his house a few days ago to pay a visit at Dunkeld. What a charming man he is!'

Olive restrained the exclamation of joy which rose to her lips. She was almost certain it was he—but she would put one more question. 'What beautiful pictures he has! I saw them lately' (she could not believe it was only yesterday). 'Has he any of yours?—Perhaps

you never part with them?' she added, blushing.

'Oh, yes, I do. The only wonder is that anyone cares to have them! He has one picture of mine, and a water-colour sketch.'

'Ah, then I know your picture. It is a stream with some ash-trees. He showed it to me. I knew it before he showed it to me, though; I saw it in the Academy. He showed me the sketch too;' and here words failed her. It was he, and at last she had found him, for the sketch represented the very place where she and Willie used to wait for each other.

She was resolved not to disclose herself. She must hear more. She longed to know if he remembered her and ever thought of those days. If he did, how delighted he would be when she told him her name, and they two were once more friends!

'I am rather anxious about that sketch,' said he. 'Mr. Ardrossan asked me to do him a tree-subject, and I did that as a design to show him, but I am half afraid he is not likely to care for it.'

Olive smiled; her smile was a very happy

one. The Willie of old used to be just a little matter-of-fact sometimes, and this speech which, with its business flavour, fell very flat on one full of romantic thoughts and memories, reminded her of other speeches made long ago, which, had failed in the same way. But this time she wronged him, as she quickly discovered when he answered her indignant inquiry as to what Mr. Ardrossan could possibly find to dislike in it by saying, ‘He may very likely think it a poor design. Certain associations make it interesting to me, but he, of course, will only judge by what is given.’

‘But I know he likes it immensely,’ said Olive. ‘He told me he did; and it is beautiful!’

‘I should like to paint it for him. If I could do anything well, it ought to be that; but do you not feel the want of figures in the sketch?’

‘Perhaps. But what kind of figures would you put?’ Olive intended this as a very searching question.

‘I don’t want to put any. I know it ought to have some, but I don’t want to put them in.

It is a recollection of my youth, and a very vivid one, but I can't let the public have the whole of it.'

'What figures would you put in if you were painting it for no one but yourself?' asked Olive.

He smiled at the directness of her inquiry ; but on such a night as this, conversation could not be expected to flow in very conventional channels ; so he answered : ' I would paint the person who is, in my mind, always associated with the place, and for whose sake it is that I care to paint it at all.' .

Olive looked up eagerly. He said, ' Now, I am sure you think that something very romantic is coming, and that this dismal night is going to be enlivened by sentimental confessions. How disappointed you will be when I tell you that she was only a little girl—a child of ten ! '

Olive was not disappointed ; she had heard what she hoped to hear, and was delighted. She was thinking of the moment, now so rapidly approaching, when she would reveal herself to him, and enjoy his pleasure in finding her once

more. He observed her silence, and continued: 'I see you are disappointed that she was not a grown-up lady, but I must honestly say that no grown-up lady has ever done half so much for me as that little child did.'

'What did she do?'

'Well, for one thing, she opened my eyes to the beauty of this world of ours, and of a life spent in enjoying and trying to understand it.'

'Mr. Morrison!' cried Olive—('I know your name from your pictures)—how can you talk so? A child of ten do this for you? Besides, you can have needed no one to point out the beauty of nature to you—you must have been a born artist—anyone can see that from your pictures!'

'I may have been born with some love of nature, but I do assure you that she awakened it. She was no older than I tell you, but so full of poetry and enthusiasm that she coloured the whole of my after life for me. Poor little thing! I dare say she often despaired of me—boys are stupid creatures at the best, and I was worse than most. What days she spent in

trying to roll me up hills—metaphorical hills, I mean, and in making me see beauties in books, or nature, which I should never have found out for myself!’

Olive was afraid to speak, lest she should put an end to a conversation which was so interesting to her. He saw that she was listening very intently, and was pleased to see her looking brighter—besides, he himself had a certain enjoyment in dwelling on memories which had slumbered in his heart for so many years. Had she been an acquaintance or friend, she would not have heard a word of this; but it is astounding what even reserved English people will say to strangers whom they meet far away from home, for the very reason that they never expect to meet them again. Still, he felt that he had indulged in a great deal of autobiography, and was not disposed to continue in the same strain.

Olive said, ‘Won’t you tell me a little more? There is no harm in talking of what happened so very long ago, and I do so want to know how anyone so young could possibly do all that you say this child did for you.’

‘ Oh, you know Wordsworth’s child, that Nature took to make a lady of her own out of? —well, mine was exactly such a one. Her love of flowers and fields, and her accurate observation of everything about them, were wonderful; and she had a pretty story, or fairy tale, for every turn and corner. I am sure it was a good thing for me to have Nature associated for ever with her and her pretty ideas and beautiful stories. She used to tell me them by the hundred, and to form such delightful plans for our future life. We were to get all our pleasure out of books and Nature, and being together—she really had a very fair idea of what Wordsworth calls plain living and high thinking, though I remember she had one feminine weakness—we were always to wear ruby velvet.’

Olive sighed to think how far she herself had strayed away from this conception of high living—once it was her own, now she wanted dresses and parties, and dancing and pleasure; and only two days ago had promised to marry a man whom she did not love, just because he was rich, and his money would procure her

these things. She thought of this now with shame and great abasement, and humbly said : ‘ It is very hard to keep to one’s first notions of what is right and nice ! ’

‘ I am thankful to say that I have not kept to mine ! My early ideal, if I had one, was that of most boys. I intended to do what I had to do pretty fairly, and thought I should be a very happy man if I left off work in a position two or three degrees above that of my father. I should probably never have had any other, had it not been for this little girl. Her influence, however, told on me much more strongly after I was parted from her. When with her, I never could be made to think. Most likely I was satisfied with enjoying her company, and never asked myself what made it so delightful. I took all her pretty little ways and joy in Nature as a matter of course when with her ; but when she left me I knew better, for I came across people of a very different stamp. Did you not think Mr. Ardrossan a very delightful man to talk to ? ’

‘ Oh, please don’t change the conversation just yet. Do tell me a little more. ’

‘There is no more to tell—I am afraid I have bored you with what I have told.’

Olive was pining to reveal herself, but first she wished to hear a few words more. Then she would do it, and, please God, henceforth, she would no longer feel so much alone in the world. ‘You don’t mind my asking you to talk about this, I hope?’ said she. ‘I am so interested in all you tell me.’

‘Oh, it is a pleasure to me to speak of her, but I think I have told you all that there is to tell. Let me see; she was brave, loyal, very unselfish, and a little genius, very pretty herself, and she had a most perfect setting. She lived in a highly picturesque old grange, and her family was respected by all who knew them—I forget what particular good thing they had done to earn this good opinion, but I think they came splendidly out of some money transaction.’

He stopped. He had summed up all that he had to say in these words, and was evidently not going to tell her any more. The time to reveal herself had now come. Olive’s heart swelled. She would put one question—she

would say, 'Then, you have never seen her since?' And when he said 'No,' she would exclaim, 'You see her now! I am the little girl you once knew—changed, but the same!' Very nervously, therefore, she said, 'You have never seen her since?'

He replied, 'Never! I can give you no idea how I used to long to do so. I don't wish it now.'

This most unexpected speech threw Olive back on herself with a shock that was most terrible. She raised her eyes to his in the utmost surprise and distress. It was too dark for him to see her expression, but he accepted it as interrogative, and replied, 'I wish to keep my recollection of her unspoilt by reality. I dare not try to see her.'

'But if you saw her by chance?'

'I hope I never shall! I know I should not like her.'

This was too much for Olive; she had hoped so much from this meeting, and it was going to be as bitter a disappointment as the rest of her life.

'You look on this as foolish,' said he; 'but can you not understand how it is? I like to

think of the bright-eyed, bright-haired, cotton-frocked, natural little creature I used to know. I am afraid, if I saw her now, all would be different; and with the sight of her as she is, the child of my recollection would perish too. Would not you feel the same? If there was a part of your life which stood out apart as perfectly happy and delightful—which you could summon up at will to delight you as a beautiful picture would do—would you run the risk of seeing it all dispersed for ever by a reality which was disagreeable, if not detestable?’

‘But,’ cried Olive, ‘it seems terribly hard to use such words, or to imagine that there is any chance of such a thing! You do not know that this would be the case: why are you so determined to think the worst?’

‘But I have reason to believe that it would be so. I have heard of her from time to time. She is very beautiful, I know, but she is not what she used to be.’

Olive sighed.

‘Ah, you do not like an ugly ending to what you are kind enough to enjoy as a pretty little story; but the end is not ugly to me, if I

keep away from her. I can shut out the present, and think only of the past, and for that I shall always be grateful.'

'But tell me just a little more about the present. What have you heard to make you speak thus?'

'Well, if you wish it; but I speak of the present under protest, for I feel it treason against the past. I know I should not like her. She has changed. She used to be natural; now one day she appears in some extravagant last-century dress which no one wears but herself, and the next in the most expensive costume a court milliner can concoct. I remember her with her poor little hands full of hedge-row flowers, and as happy as a queen when she found a new one. Now she takes the roses out of her bonnet to sell them at a guinea a-piece to anyone who will give it.'

'At a bazaar, you must mean?' cried Olive.

'Of course.'

'Well, is it so very wrong?'

'Perhaps not, but it shows the kind of world in which she lives. She spends her

whole life in gaiety—balls, bazaars, and such things, are all she cares for now. She and I belong to different worlds, and are best apart. Her father is an officer of very high rank, mine was a clerk. I do not suppose that, even if I wished it, I should ever be allowed to speak to her—my rank is far below hers.’

‘Oh, but I’m sure she would never think of that,’ Olive hastened to say; ‘she would be only too glad to see you again.’

‘I am not sure that I wish it. I used to wonder if she could ever overlook the difference in station between us; now my feeling has changed. I do not think that I could ever bring myself to see much of her relations—some of them are anything but creditable. However, the truth is, that it is vain to try to knit up the present with the past: each part of our lives has its own pleasures and hopes.’

‘I am afraid you are right,’ exclaimed Olive, who was still quivering with pain at his last speech; ‘it is indeed in vain.’

‘Yes, it is a pleasant memory; if I tried to get more, I should lose all. I did go to the village where I met her. I had longed

to go there for years before I succeeded in doing it.'

'Well?' said Olive eagerly, for with all her heart she too longed to go there once more.

'Well, I was wofully disappointed! From my recollection, I expected to find a perfectly beautiful village, with fields and woods, and everything else, far prettier than could be found elsewhere.'

'And you mean to say you did not?' she exclaimed impatiently.

'Yes; it was a very poor commonplace village, and I was grievously disappointed! I was vexed that I had gone to see it, but the same misfortune would most likely befall me if I saw her.'

'Don't try to see her! Keep away from her! I am quite of your way of thinking,' cried Olive, irretrievably piqued by his words. It was the slight to her dear Austerfield which had finally done this. She could partly forgive what he had said of herself, for conscience told her that there was a great deal of truth in it; but there could be no foundation for what he had said of that dear place, and she felt as if she

could never forgive him. If he did not think Austerfield beautiful, there must be some great want in himself.

‘Ugly as the place is,’ said she, rather bitterly, after a short pause, ‘you were able to make a beautiful drawing of it.’

‘Ah, I shall always think that particular spot beautiful,’ he answered. ‘It is astonishing what associations will do for a place!’

‘Enjoy your associations!’ thought Olive; ‘dwell on your sentimental recollections undisturbed. You might have had the reality back, if you had liked. You might have had me as your true and loving friend.’ He did not wish it, so there was no more to be said. From the instant he had said that, she had given up all thought of revealing herself to him. This was the meeting for which she had once longed so ardently!

‘Let me help you,’ said he; he saw her struggling with a large flake of snow, which, in spite of all precautions, had found its way into the carriage. It was on her shoulder, and as he stooped to remove it, he saw how much more ill she looked than before. ‘I was

hoping that you were better ; I am afraid the nonsense I have been talking has tired you. I have been very thoughtless ; is there nothing I can do for you ? ’

‘ Nothing,’ she said, passing a weary hand over an aching forehead ; ‘ nothing at all, thank you.’

‘ You will perhaps feel better if we do not speak. I have been foolish.’

‘ I think we had better not talk, perhaps,’ said Olive sadly, for she was wishing with all her heart that she had not seen him. ‘ I beg your pardon,’ she added, with some consciousness that he might be reading her thoughts ; ‘ I only say so because I am all at once feeling very tired.’

‘ Oh, do let me go and try to bring your mother back to you.’

Olive shuddered. Anyone rather than Lady Brooke ! She shook her head.

‘ Then, your maid ? I will make a thorough search for her.’

‘ I am afraid I must ask you to bring her—that is, if you can.’

‘ I will take great care of her,’ replied he ; ‘ but come she must.’

Olive's ghastly face made him wretchedly anxious. He got out, and found the way more blocked up than ever. The driver, stoker, and some of the men were sitting huddled up in one of the carriages, into which he dived in search of Pearson. They were all smoking as if their lives depended on it.

'Ye seem an unco supple young man,' said a voice from the depths of the van. 'How do ye manage to get aboot sae weel?'

'I have to do as well as I can. How long will it be before some help comes?'

'That's the varra thing we want to ken. I hope naething's come to the gaird. I'm feared he has na managed to get on to Blair Angus.'

'You surely don't think the poor fellow is lost in the snow?' asked Morrison.

'God only kens. It's a terrible nicht! Lord save us all! It's a thousand to ane if he wans to his journey's end!'

'Then where is he?'

'Somewhere twixt here and Blair Angus in a snow-wreath.'

'He shouldna hae attempted to lift his fit out o' the wheel-tracks,' said one.

‘Ma sang! he couldna lift it if he tried! I saw him start. The snaw was up to his waist; he never did lift his fit up, the snaw was ower deep for that, he just shoved the left fit after the richt, and so on, all the way.’

‘That would be well enough so long as there was a wheel-track,’ observed another; ‘but look how fast that would fill up!’

‘Well, I hope he’s a’ richt. He’s a strong eneuch chiel. Ma certy, but it needs a steave heart for sic work as he has afore him this nicht!’

‘He is long in coming back. It’s my belief he has met with an accident,’ said a voice from a dark corner.

‘Nay, there’s nae need to mak’ sae sure o’ that. The goods may be somewhere just ahint us, and that would hae to be howkit out afore any relief train could win to us, and baith an E. P. and an O. P. ought to hae left Blair Angus since we got ourselves stickit fast here.’

‘I tell you what,’ said Morrison; ‘some of us might go a little way along the line, for this relief train may be on its way; at all events,

we might get some food from it, and let the men know where we are.'

'What's the use?' cried the men unanimously. 'Just foolhardiness! We'd be smooored in the snaw! When the gaird went, if he had noucht else, he had the wheel-tracks to guide him; there's naething o' that left now.'

'There might be some sense in trying sic a thing if it was a matter o' life or death—not unless!'

Morrison pursued his search for Pearson. At last he found her in a corner of a first-class carriage, whither she had been conveyed by some of the railway servants for greater warmth and comfort. He had no difficulty in persuading her to go to her young mistress. He helped her on her way with the greatest care and kindness: but when they reached the carriage, and he had put Pearson into it, he was startled by a loud scream—Olive had fainted.

CHAPTER XXII.

O, for a horse with wings !—*Cymbeline*.

‘SHE is dead, sir!’ cried Pearson, throwing up her arms in despair. ‘Just look!’ and when he did look, he was afraid that the maid’s words were true. He soon recovered the first shock sufficiently to know that it was all but impossible that this should be the case, and that she had probably only fainted. With Pearson’s help he raised her, dragged out the seats of the carriage, and made a bed for her to lie on. The rug which he had fastened up to protect her had fallen down, and now a fine shower of snow was descending lightly on her wan face. ‘Leave it,’ said he; ‘it will help to revive her.’

He chafed her hands. He found Lady Brooke’s *eau-de-Cologne* and poured some on her temples, but nothing seemed to restore her.

While doing this, he was nearer to her, and saw her features much more distinctly than the darkness had hitherto allowed him to do. Ill as she looked, the lines of her face were very fine, and he could see that, under other circumstances, she must be remarkably beautiful. Something in these lines stirred an old memory. ‘Pshaw!’ said he to himself, ‘it is because we have been talking of these bygone days.’

‘Go on rubbing her hands—do all you can. I must go from carriage to carriage to see if I can find a doctor in the train, or, at any rate, some one who has some brandy,’ said he to the maid.

There was no doctor, no brandy, there was not even a fragment of food. Everything of that kind had been consumed hours before. He went back to the carriage where the driver and men were, and asked abruptly, ‘Does any one here know anything of the neighbourhood where we are? How far is it to the nearest place where a doctor is to be found?’

The only one who happened to know the place was an Englishman, the others came from farther north. ‘If this is Macgillivray’s Gap,

as we reckon it is, we are a good two mile and a half from doctors and doctors' help. Auchterlundie is the nearest place to get it, and it lies about half a mile off the line.'

'On which side—windward, or leeward?'

The speaker, who was close by the door, pointed to the windward side with a short stumpy pipe, and added, 'There is a short cut by the fields, but it's past finding now. I know the place well; I've a sister married there.'

'Is this village in the same direction as the guard went?'

'No, he went down the line; this is up.'

'All right! Will anyone go with me?' asked Morrison, hurriedly. 'A lady is very ill—it may be a case of life and death.'

No one refused, but no one offered to go. One said it would be a corbie's errand, which allusion to Noah's first unsuccessful messenger was lost on Morrison, who was anxiously waiting their decision. They shuffled about uneasily on the seat, and said it was a terrible wild night, and it would surely be better to wait until daylight; any of them would be willing to go then. 'If I go myself,' said

Morrison, 'how am I to know where Auchterlundie is? There is no station there, you say?'

'There is a signalman's cabin, but nae doctor would come back wi' ye if ye did manage to win sae far, which is na likely.'

'I don't know—he might ; at all events, he would give me some brandy, or medicine, or something. One can't let a fellow-creature die without some help. Can anyone furnish me with a lantern?'

A lantern was found. He pulled up the collar of his coat, and prepared to set out ; but first he went back to see if the poor girl whom he had just left had recovered. She was still unconscious, but showed signs of coming round.

'Sir,' said the maid, 'it's my belief that it is only weakness. She is faint for want of food. She ought to have a good glass of wine. She is as cold as ice! It's just miserable to have nothing to give her.'

'I will go and bring her something, but I shall be a long time in returning—ought you not to have her mother with you? I'll bring her.'

'Lor, sir, no! She'd want far more looking

after than the poor young lady. She'd be in a hundred troubles about the harm she **herself** would take if this and that and the other wasn't got for her.—that's her way. Just leave her where she is, I am not afraid of being alone.'

It was now nearly eleven o'clock. Without more delay, Morrison set out. The first plunge into the snow took him up to the waist, and he found it absolutely impossible to move farther. A little reflection made him work his way to the windward side, and there, as he expected, he found the snow hard enough to walk on; but he had now the whole force of the wind to contend with, and pitiless it was! One terrific blast after another came raging down from the heights on his right hand, bearing with it a deluge of cuttingly cold snow. It forced its way down his neck, it filled his ears, and blinded his eyes. Not a star, of course, was to be seen, not the faintest vestige of a track to be discovered; only one land-mark guided him on his way—the telegraph-posts. Whenever he came to one of these, he knew that he was going right, and thus he slowly made his way onwards. He was perfectly aware that he

carried his life in his hand—but one false step, or fall into a snow-drift, and there would be little chance of his being able to extricate himself. In spite of the heat of the flame within it, the glass of his lantern was constantly becoming obscured by snow, which in two or three minutes congealed and turned into dull ice—he was continually obliged to stop to clear this. No doubt this fact accounted for his having seen no lamps when, in search for the maid, he came to the end of the train. Two red ones had been burning there, but were now deeply buried, or extinguished.

The exertion of walking kept him thoroughly warm; only his face, ears, neck, and wrists suffered from exposure to the wind and snow, and they suffered frightfully. Hurry as he might, he made very slow progress, for the wind steadily opposed his advance. No beautiful place or object seen by him during the whole course of his life had ever given him half the pleasure that the sight of a telegraph-post now did. One by one, as he passed them, he uttered a fervent exclamation of gratitude. They were the sole link between himself and

safety. They were white now with snow, but he had to keep very close to the side of the line where they were, for in this blinding drift he could not see any object that was even six feet from him. He might perhaps have got half-way to Auchterlundie, when he came to a part where the line ran upon a higher level, and was consequently entirely free from snow. Every single grain had been blown off it. He set his feet firmly down on this, and began to stamp, to shake off all the snow which had collected about his feet and legs, when the wind suddenly blew out his lantern, and struggling onwards—for he felt this complete exposure to the wind was almost worse than the snow itself—he was caught by a strong gust, half blinded by the sand and gravel it was carrying with it, blown off the line down the embankment, and flung into a deep drift at the bottom. Somehow, he did not seem to sink very deep into it! There was an instant of the most intense physical relief—all battling was for the moment over, and he stopped to recover breath. He soon found, however, that he had no time to lose, for he was rapidly being covered over.

He had been flung across a large railway-gate at the foot of the embankment, and this had saved his life. The wind-swept snow hardened instantly—he tried it and found that it would now bear him. Having gained his feet, he stood for a minute to recover himself, and even during that short space of time saw the hole made by his body while he was lying across the gate fill up. ‘That might have been my grave!’ thought he with a slight shudder. He did not much miss his lantern, for the snow gave out a kind of light which was enough for him. He struggled back to the line, planting each step with extreme care; he did not, however, risk a second violent attack from the wind, but crept along the bare ground on hands and knees. The part of the line which was thus cleared was about a sixteenth of a mile in length, then he came to the snow again, and had to fight his way through it as before. It was a hard and terrible battle, but at last he came to the signalman’s cabin. It was beneath the embankment, covered with snow, and Morrison only saw it by mere chance, for, near as it was, the light burning inside it was almost in-

visible in the storm. 'I'll cry out,' said he to himself, 'and make him hear me;' but when he opened his lips to do so, he found he could make no sound—his voice had dwindled down to a feeble whisper. He tried the snow—it bore him, and he painfully made his weary way to the door, knocked loudly, and waited.

'Who's there?' cried a voice through the keyhole.

Morrison did his utmost to return an answer which was audible, but could not, and had to content himself with knocking again. The door was opened, and he staggered in.

'God be aboot us! Who are ye, and what are ye doing out here on sic a nicht as this?' cried the man, and then he turned to the door; but short as had been the time spent in putting this inquiry, he found great difficulty in clearing the hinges and doorway so as to shut it. When at last he succeeded in doing so, and turned to look at the stranger who thus claimed his hospitality, he was startled at the expression in Morrison's face. It was awful—so stony and so rigid. One side of his head was literally covered with a sheet of solid ice.

‘For God’s sake sit down, sir! Sit down on the ground afore the fire and get yourself thawed—Ye’ll be losing your ear if ye dinna mind what ye’re about!’

That was what Morrison was afraid of; there was, indeed, every reason to fear it. He sat down in front of a warm fire, and gradually the heat brought off the whole mask of ice with the impression of the sufferer’s ear moulded into it as exactly as if it had been done by a sculptor in plaster.

‘Never ye fash yersel wi’ looking at that!’ exclaimed the signalman, seeing Morrison hold ing it flat on one palm and gazing at it in rueful wonder. ‘Here’s a cup of scalding het coffee for ye. Swallow it down, man, and ye’ll feel the good of it directly. Come, there’s naething like coffee unless maybe it’s whisky, and that’s forbidden here, ye ken, and I hav’na ae drap in the hut.’

Morrison drank the coffee, broke the icicles off his hair and beard, and cleared his neck of snow. It was now thoroughly mixed with ice. His sleeves were full of it, his pockets also, and so were the tops of his boots. He sighed a

heavy sigh of relief, which made his chest feel as if pierced by a hundred knives at once. He tried to speak, but still could only whisper, and it was painful to him even to do that.

‘What in the name of Heeven’s brocht ye oot on sic a like nicht as this? It’s neither fit for man nor beast.’

‘I was forced to come out. I have come from a train that is snowed up two miles farther down the line.’

‘Ay, my mate was wondering what had come till’t.’

‘Well, I’ve got here, but I must go farther yet.’

‘The deil’s in the man!—ye mean to tempt Providence! Deil a fit can ye steer out of this the nicht—it’s mair than ye can dae, or onybody else! Hae some mair coffee, and just bide whaur ye are till daylight, when my mate is sure to be here to relieve me. Ye ken it’s agin the laws for onybody to come into my place here, but there’s naething doing the nicht, and naebody will be ony the wiser for it.’

Morrison shook his head and pulled out his watch. As might have been expected, the cold

had stopped it. He looked at the large clock in the cabin. It was two o'clock. He had spent nearly three hours in walking two miles!

‘Dinna be in sic a hurry! The wind is getting loun a bit, I do believe.’

The wind was going down, but still it was very strong. ‘I must not stop,’ replied he; ‘your coffee has restored my strength. I must go on to Auchterlundie at once. I want a doctor. Do you know whereabouts in the place the doctor lives?’

‘He lives at the far end o’ the toun, but that’s no saying much, for Auchterlundie is a wee bit place. He’s maybe no just at his ain hoose the nicht. I jealouse it’s maist likely ye’ll find him at mine. I expect he’s wi’ my wife, for she was requiring his services. Ma hoose is the third ye come to on the left-hand side. Ye’ll see a licht in the winda. Gang round the cabin whén ye gae out, and haud awa’ to your left hand for the feck of a hunner yards, or maybe twa.’

Morrison rose to go. He was vexed at the loss of time, but this brief delay had been in-

evitable. He offered the man half-a-crown, but this he refused indignantly, and said,

‘Tak’ this muckle stick in yer hand, ye’ll need it; pit a steich heart to the stee’ brae, and God gang wi’ ye. If ye come back this way, ye can tell me whether my wife has got a lassie or a laddie. Ye maun mind tak’ tent that the snaw bears ye weel eneuch whaur the wind catches and hairdens it, but ye’ll gang through it like leid if ye set yer fit on it in a place that’s onyways proteckit.’

Morrison had observed this fact for himself. He now used this knowledge carefully as he crept round the deeply embedded cabin. The village was only half a mile off. He traversed this part of the way much more quickly than that which he had gone before, but nevertheless it was no easy journey. He looked out for the promised light most eagerly, but the night must have improved very much or he could have had no chance of seeing this, unless close to it. After some time, he thought he did see a feeble glimmer, but whenever he most thought so, a fresh gust of wind and snow seemed to cut him off from all hope of this kind.

There was a light! It was in what on any other occasion would have been an upper window of a small house. Now a hill of snow sloped up to it, but when Morrison tried to scale this, he found that it was on the wrong side of the house, and that the snow was soft. He hastily retreated, and stood considering what he could do to summon the inmates, now that he had no power to raise his voice to call them, or to make any sound louder than a husky whisper. The signalman had put a stick into his hand when he left the cabin. Morrison now tried to climb up the snow on the wind-raked side of the cottage, and to lean round the corner, and tap at the window where the light was visible, with his stick, but unfortunately it was too short, and he was terribly afraid of overbalancing himself, or of finding some weak spot in the snow on which he was standing, and falling into the deep drift by the other side of the house, where he would have to lie without hope of help, now that his voice had left him and he could cry for none. Rather than descend without doing anything here, he contented himself with aiming hard blows at

the walls of the room whence the light proceeded. 'If it were but a London house!' thought he, calling to mind a night not so very long ago when he had seized on a hammer and a large nail to hang up a precious and newly-acquired 'Liber' proof, and the second or third stroke of the hammer had driven a brick out of the wall into the passage on the other side, with much less difficulty than noise. His heart well-nigh failed him when repeated blows seemed to call forth no answer—bring no help. What could he do at such an hour as this at houses where all were sound asleep? At last the window opened, and a woman put her head out to see what could be the matter. She cried, 'Who's there?' but alas! Morrison could not bring forth any sound from his lips which could by any chance reach her ears. The wind, abated though it was, was still louder a hundred times than his faint whisper—and how this whisper hurt him!

Before she shut the window and left him to his fate, he had the lucky thought to show his stick round the corner where she was, and aim one stroke more at the wall.

‘Mercy on us!’ cried she; ‘who’s there?’

The doctor—he was there—came downstairs at once, opened the door and forced a passage out, and then Morrison made his presence known.

‘Come inside,’ said the doctor. ‘Drink some of this,’ was his next speech, as he poured out nearly a tumblerful of whisky. It tasted like pleasantly flavoured water, but Morrison was mightily refreshed by it. Then he told his errand.

‘I was just going home,’ said the doctor. ‘I’ll come with you if you want me. As you say, the wind has certainly gone down. From what you tell me, I have no doubt the train is stopped in Macgillivray’s Gap—I know the place very well; but it would have to be a very urgent case which would make me venture there if the weather was still as bad as it was half an hour ago! I canna, for the life of me, conceive how you ever got here! You have come a good three miles in the deep snow, without so much as a landmark! We can wait a quarter of an hour or so, I suppose. Every minute makes it safer. I don’t mind a

little snow—I'm used to that—it's the wind that's the deevil and a' to contend with !'

'Every minute may make it better for us, but it makes it worse for the poor young lady,' said Morrison, much aggrieved; 'and, of course, I have been very long on my way.'

'But what can I do for her, when I am there? From all you tell me, I should say that there's nothing the matter with her except that she wants food and warmth, and getting away from that snow-trap. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll go home now—it won't take me ten minutes both to go and come back. I'll rouse up my housekeeper, and make her get a warm bed ready, and some supper, and we will bring the lady and her mother here across the fields—that's the best thing we can do for her !'

'By the fields?'

'Yes. The moment the wind is down, that will be as good a road as you can have! The wind will have swept every bit of snow off them. You and I will go that way now, and see if it is practicable.'

'I don't like losing sight of the telegraph-posts,' said Morrison.

‘Oh, you may trust yourself to me. If the wind lets us go that way at all, it will let us go safely. There’ll be no snow there, I tell you, but it will lie for days in the cuttings and hollows just as deep as it does now.’

Morrison still demurred. ‘The stoker told me there was a short cut, but said it was not safe to use it.’

‘No more it was then! The wind would have blown you away like a dried leaf; but you won’t understand that a tempest like this sweeps as clean as a new broom; and when once it is over, sensible folks have nothing to do but profit by its work. Now I’m off; get ye something to eat while I am away. Here, Mysie, Maggie, lassies, one of you, come here and attend to the gentleman. I’ll give some of the people in the village a hint that they may have visitors before long; I dare say lots of them in the train there will be glad enough to get away when once we have shown them that there is a way.’

‘You will bring some brandy with you, and any restoratives you are likely to want?’

‘Brandy! You Southrons all fly to brandy, where we should just take a pint of whisky.’

Morrison liked Dr. Cameron’s looks and quick resolute ways, and was thoroughly inclined to trust him. He trusted him still more when, in an incredibly short space of time considering all impediments, he saw him arrive with two men bearing two stout spades and an arm-chair. ‘That’s for your sick leddy,’ said Dr. Cameron. ‘We will carry her here like a queen!’

‘We shall have to be on our guard,’ whispered Morrison, ‘or we shall have the mother taking possession of the chair, instead of the daughter. The mother is, without exception, the most selfish creature I ever saw!’

‘We will take care of that; but mind you, I do not like your going out again—you are not fit for it, and I should not have allowed you to stir if I had not been forced. I know my way to Macgillivray’s Gap well enough, but I don’t know the young leddy; and as for looking out for one who seems to be ill, there won’t be many in the train to-night who will look

well. I suppose,' he added with a smile, 'you want me to get this particular one in whom you are interested?'

'Yes, but I never saw her before this evening. She is a perfect stranger to me.'

'Well, we will take every possible care of her. You have risked your life for her, at all events.'

All this was said while they were making their way as best they could to the blocked-up train. Everything was as Dr. Cameron had foretold. Their path now led across what would in daylight have been green fields. Not one vestige of snow was to be seen except in the ditches and hollows. There it was deep enough to take them twice overhead. The wind was slowly dying away, and though from time to time it still blew fiercely, there was a kind of periodicity about its gusts which enabled them to ward off its attacks, and, most important of all now, to save their lanterns. At last Dr. Cameron said, 'We are close on the Gap, I think; if so we shall have to use our spades. We must make our way on to the line somewhere where the cutting is low.' Morrison

was actually seizing on a spade to help, but the doctor very quickly put a stop to that.

They reached the train safely, found the carriage and Olive, though they would have had some difficulty in doing this if they had been without their lanterns, for by this time the slender allowance of oil in the lamps in the carriages was quite exhausted, and all was dark. She was perfectly conscious now, but very weak and ill. Almost everyone in the train joyfully snatched at this chance of escape from imprisonment, and large was the procession which returned to the village.

It was several days before Olive was well enough to be moved from Dr. Cameron's house. Of all those who had suffered, she was the last to recover and be taken home. When the time for departure drew near, she said to Lady Brooke, 'We shall pass very near Austerfield; will you leave me there for a month with my Aunt Lettice? I should very much like to go to her.'

'Oh, no, it is not at all a nice place for you. You must come with me to London.'

‘ Oh, do let me stay there. Once, I know, Uncle Richard thought it was not well for me to be at Austerfield ; but he need have no fear of leaving me there now—I am older and wiser.’

CHAPTER XXIII.

Full many a shaft at random sent
Finds mark the archer little meant.

IN the western and north-western districts of London, house after house may be seen which must by its deviation from regularity and convention drive the Board of Works to despair. Corners jut out where no corners should be, queer-shaped windows trespass on the roofs, and long slits of windows, closely shuttered, baffle all conjecture as to their use, until you discover that you are in an artists' quarter, and that the big windows are to give them light to paint their pictures, and the slits are used to send forth into the world canvases too large for any ordinary mode of egress, windows of the latter kind never being opened except on 'sending-in day,' when the work of the year is carted away to judgment. Of late, artists'

houses have become as much show places as old Italian palaces, each painter setting the seal of his individual taste on all about him; and in many cases their rooms are perfect storehouses of treasures brought back from distant sketching-grounds. William Morrison's studio in Chaucer Street was not by any means luxurious or magnificent—he belonged to the despised branch of the profession—but still it was very pretty, though he himself was in the habit of regarding it only as a suitable background to pictures whose colour-composition demanded the utmost harmony both in the artist's mind and surroundings. The walls were hung with some quiet-looking, faded old Italian tapestry, and the floor was covered with a very pretty Persian carpet. There was not a great deal of furniture in the room, but there were a large number of the water-bottles of other countries—the long-necked, stout-bodied, red, green, and yellow pitchers which, having gone to fountains in other lands for many and many a year without being broken, have at last come here to supply a number of houses with a touch of picturesqueness. Liber proofs, Turner en-

gravings, and Méryon etchings hung about, or lay about waiting till some one had time to find a place for them ; but except for these, and a few other things, and two or three comfortable chairs and a sofa, the room was a work-place, and every corner a labyrinth of half-finished pictures, picture-frames, and easels.

Morrison himself was hard at work, getting some water-colour drawings ready for a winter exhibition, and a splendid tabby cat, which was a great favourite of his, was sitting on the table by him, blinking affectionately, as he dipped his brush in the colours, and occasionally putting out a soft tentative paw to play with it. She was perfectly aware when he brought out a new drawing to work on, and always stood up with a Moorish-arch-like stretch to look at it, then having given her sanction to the undertaking, she sat down again in sleek, velvety beauty, until once more disturbed by some novelty. He talked a great deal to her, and for the most part she listened with pleased attention, only opening and shutting her eyes to show good-will and companionship ; but

when he put a tone of extra urgency into his speech, she made the round of his table with her tail up, rubbing herself against his drawing-board as she passed it, and then dropped down again into her old place.

‘Botheration! Puss! Who is that?’ cried he, as he heard a loud peal at the bell. Puss jerked up her ears, but did not seem able to answer otherwise.

‘Mr. Ambergreen wishes to see you, sir—only for a moment, on business,’ added the servant, seeing Morrison’s look of impatience. Ambergreen was a man to whom it was more trouble to say no than yes, so Morrison uttered a discontented, ‘Let him come in.’

‘I only came to ask you a few questions, my dear Morrison,’ said he; ‘I know you are busy, but you won’t mind me, I am sure. Go on with your work, please, just as if I were not here.’ That was much more easily said than done, and Ambergreen himself was a man who could not have painted a stroke if anyone was with him, to save his life.

‘I am going to send in for competition to the Old Water-Colour Society. Tell me what

one has to do to get elected—or does one do anything? Will they elect me on my reputation? That would be the best way.'

Never perhaps in Morrison's life had he opened his eyes so wide as he did now. 'But you don't paint in water-colours!' cried he.

'No, but I am going to—the election is not till spring. There is plenty of time before it comes off; only, you must tell me what steps to take.'

'Send in three very good drawings, framed close.'

'Never mind about the frames——'

'No, if you have never painted water-colours before, I do not think that the frames will be the great difficulty,' said Morrison, laughing good-naturedly.

'You may laugh, but I'll do it. I am an oil painter, of course, but what does the medium signify? A man who can paint in oils can paint in water-colours; but you are sure that they will expect me to send in?—they ought to know my work very well—do you really think it is necessary?'

'Yes, indeed I do. Why, they might elect

you on your merit, and you might yourself be placed in a difficulty—might discover that water-colours were not your *forte*, I mean.'

'Oh, there is no chance of that—I must do some. Mordew is always asking me for water-colours; he says he could place everything I did, if I would only let him have a lot. Besides, look what a bother oil-colours and canvases are in the country, when you are doing landscape.'

'Landscape!' exclaimed Morrison; 'but you never paint landscape.'

'Not paint landscape? What do you call that acre of mud that I put my last saint up to the waist in? You fellows are so abominably cheeky about your poor little mixtures of mist and mountain, and your precious passages of mystery. When I paint anything, I like everyone to know what it is. It did a lot of people who always go off to German baths no end of good to look at my mud.'

'Well, but the chief interest of your picture—the point and poetry of it, I mean—did not lie in the mud.'

'Eh, I am not so sure of that. But I have

painted three things that you would call landscapes, while you have been away, and sold them too. It's queer what a fancy the public has for pictures of that kind; have them they will; but that's not why I have been doing them. I don't care a rush for the public; I paint landscape because I consider a man is only half an artist who can't paint all round.'

'Paint all round if less won't satisfy you, but it will take you some time to learn your facts—a lifetime, I should say, for a very small group of them. It's not so easy as you seem to think, by a long way.'

'Well, I won't say it is easy, at any rate not before you; but I'll be hanged if I can see how anyone who has been trained to draw the figure, and has had to use his brains to invent figure-subjects, can find any difficulty in sitting down and painting a landscape. What have you to do but paint it? There it is, all ready for you—you have not got to imagine anything. Ideas are not wanted, we all know.'

'If you could but know what awful nonsense you are talking!' cried Morrison.

'No, I am not; you may not be such a stickler for the real thing, and nothing but the

real thing, as some are, but I am sure I have heard you say often enough that Nature wants no improving that we can give her, and I can see any amount of landscape-men now-a-days working on regular Ordnance-surveyor's principles of industry and accuracy; so, where are you to slip in your ideas if you have them? That's not the way I'll paint. My notion is quite different. Generalise your forms well, choose good broad oppositions of simple tones, look to your values—that's what you want for landscape-painting; it's not creative work, you know. And then, there's no doubt about it, a man should be able to paint everything. There should be no divisions of labour whatever in our profession. I like an artist who practises every kind of art. Brixton is a man of that sort—you know him. Last Monday I went in, and he was japanning his grandmother's tea-caddy; to-day he was painting away like a dragon at his "Lifting the Veil of the Infinite."

Morrison shrugged his shoulders, and said that for his own part he feared that he would find life too short to do even one thing well, in the narrowest range that he could find for himself.

‘Nonsense! Read the lives of the old masters! they knew best. Everything that could be done by tools was done by them, from chasing a little cup to carving a great statue; and as for lines, it did not matter to them whether they busied themselves with those of a picture or of a fortification.’

‘All right! If you take the old masters for your guides, you had better paint your landscapes according to Botticelli’s notions, and then you’ll produce them fast enough.’

‘I don’t remember what that glorious old fellow said on the subject,’ replied Ambergreen. ‘Tell me.’

‘He says that if you throw a sponge filled with several different colours against a wall, you will find that the stain it makes will be a very fair landscape.’

‘That sounds absurd, of course, to you, but I dare say there is a great deal of truth in it. However, I am going to set to work in the regular, lawful, and approved way, and we shall see how I succeed.’

‘Try it,’ said Morrison gaily. ‘I’m sure I don’t want to hinder anyone doing what he

thinks he can do well ; but you never seem to think that clouds and trees and mountains require as much knowledge as figures do, and that each is a study by itself.'

'That's what you landscape-men all say ; but I am quite sure that, after a man has gone through the training that I have, he can paint anything.'

'He can paint mountains, and skies, and waterfalls, no doubt, and never know how ill he has done them. The chances are that he will sin against some law in every inch of canvas he covers, and produce a work as ridiculous to anyone who knows anything about it as a figure-picture would be in which the artist had painted people's mouths in the centre of their foreheads.'

'Well, come and gridiron me when the thing is done. Here is some one coming to disturb you. I don't call it at all fair of people to come and use a painter's time by daylight when there is so little of it. But they will do it, and it is very selfish. Oh, it is Mr. Ardrossan !'

'How do you do, Ambergreen?' said that

gentleman ; ‘ how are you, Morrison ? I have just returned from Scotland, and am happy to tell you that I had a better journey home than you had. You really had a terrible experience ! ’

‘ Morrison is just the kind of fellow who would be delighted with such an experience,’ exclaimed Ambergreen ; ‘ he likes study, and seems to be able to get it out of things which would kill most people. He stayed at St. Hilda’s, a horrible fishing-place, last winter, hoping to see storms, and wrecks, and horrors of that kind, and gave his landlord a standing order to telegraph to him whenever a hurricane was expected. Such a fellow does not deserve to rest quietly in a good bed ; he ought to pass the winter lashed to the mast of a Greenland whaler.’

Mr. Ardrossan smiled at both the young men. Ambergreen continued :

‘ Now, I tell him that he would paint a thousand times better with half the knowledge, and be ever so much more poetical if he trusted more to his imagination and less to his study of the fact.’

‘It is a large word which you are using when you talk of imagination so lightly,’ said Mr. Ardrossan.

‘Oh, don’t come down on me about it,’ cried the light-hearted Ambergreen. ‘I know exactly what I mean. Morrison’s work is delicious—tender and delicate, and all that sort of thing, but he should knock his subject about more, and not be in such bondage to realities.’

‘Do you object, then, to a landscape painter being in bondage to nature, as a lover to his mistress?’

‘Oh, I know nothing about that view of landscape painting, but I am sure it’s very easy to have a deal too much of nature. To me one kind of nature is much the same as another—none of it is worth much without figures. Of course we all know that there is an imaginative quality in our friend’s work, but he stifles it with his truths.’

‘Thank you,’ said Morrison. ‘Ambergreen and I, Mr. Ardrossan, have very different notions of what imagination means. He won’t call anything imaginative which gives us the life of to-day in its full vividness—in its ugliness

if you like, only conquering that ugliness by beauty of art. If he paints figures, he despises mere men and women, and has to go back to early times for saints, or savage kings and queens; and when he paints his landscapes, he will be sure to put nymphs and goblins in them. Now, to my mind, imaginative work consists, not in altering or forsaking the thing that is, but in giving its full character, with the artist's strong feeling of sympathy and beauty super——'

'Oh, do have mercy!' cried Ambergreen; 'I'll run away if you talk in that way. I like to feel on what kind of ground I am standing, and I never do when conversation soars so. I was once waltzing with a lady at a ball, and what do you think she said when we stopped to take breath?—"Mr. Ambergreen, pray tell me what you think about the human mind?" I was more out of breath with that than with the dancing.'

'By-the-bye, Morrison,' exclaimed Mr. Ardrossan, who was tired of Ambergreen, 'I hope you are no worse for that terrible adventure of yours. Were you long in recovering your voice?'

‘ Oh, no—a day or so. I should have got it back sooner, I dare say, if I could have stayed at Auchterlundie ; but the place was filled up with ladies, and all the men had to go to the nearest town—not that night, of course, but the next day.’

‘ Wasn’t it hard ? ’ cried Ambergreen. ‘ My poor friend here risked his life for a pretty lady, and never saw her again ! ’

‘ Risked my life ? ’ cried Morrison ; ‘ I don’t know that it amounted to that ; had a disagreeable walk, you mean, just as the guard had, and he came safely through ; and as for the lady, she was not much to look at, poor thing, by the time we got her to Auchterlundie, nor her mother either—not that I pitied her.’

‘ Morrison ! ’ cried Ambergreen, ‘ you are a queer fellow, you really are ! He nearly loses his life for a girl, and then he comes away by the next train without so much as getting to know her name ! Now I should expect all kinds of things to spring out of such an adventure as that.’

‘ Oh, no ; her name is of no consequence to me ; and how could I get to know it ? Neither

she nor her mother could speak when I last saw them. I mean, not unless it was absolutely necessary ; besides, I think I very likely could hear all about her by giving Mr. Ardrossan a little trouble.'

'But what can I do?,' said Mr. Ardrossan, roused from the study of a drawing to which he had abandoned himself.

'This lady—I believe under less trying circumstances she would have been very pretty—had just been to Glen Duich to see your pictures. She said you had shown her that thing you have of mine. She was quite young, rather tall, had dark hair, and——'

'Had she seen them just before the snow-storm?'

'Only just before—she said so.'

'Then, it was Miss Brooke ! How strange I never heard she had been in that train !'

'Miss Brooke ! Not Miss Olive Brooke ?' cried Morrison ; 'and yet I do think it was !'

'Of course it was. She was very beautiful?'

'So far as I could judge, she was.'

'Yes, you must have met Miss Brooke. She came to Glen Duich with the Ellertons. She

was delighted with your picture, and asked numbers of questions about you. She stood over that sketch of yours, and looked quite overcome by it.' Morrison was so amazed at his own stupidity that he could not speak. How could he have failed to recognise her? not by her face, for the bad light would account for his not doing that, even if ten years had not changed her; but he might have known who she was by the questions she had asked, and the interest she had shown. But not knowing her was a trifle compared with having said foolish and unkind things to her!

'You amaze me!' he said. 'That Miss Brooke, and I did not know her! She and I were friends years ago. I don't know what I shall do. I said things to her which she will never forgive! Are you likely to see her?'

'I'll go and see her for you,' cried the irrepressible Ambergreen, interrupting. 'Tell me what you want said to her, and I'll say it. I know her very well indeed. Didn't I paint her as Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, with six penny-buns in her pinafore?'

'Ambergreen, I do wish you would hold

your tongue !' exclaimed Morrison, between laughter and vexation. But Ambergreen never cared to please anyone but himself, and continued : ' Yes, I did ; I married her to old Hopwood. He bought the picture while I was painting it, so I made him sit for the King—people do think such a great deal of the pictures you paint for them when their own abominable faces appear in them ! Good morning, Morrison. Good morning, Mr. Ardrossan.'

' Good morning,' said Mr. Ardrossan. ' I wonder you are not afraid to let me so much behind the scenes. When you propose to put me in a picture, I shall know what you mean.'

' No, indeed you won't !' cried Ambergreen gaily and by no means disconcerted. ' I'd give anything for you in the picture I am doing now. I am painting Sir Percival just catching a glimpse of the Holy Grail, and I do not know anyone in London who has such a face for Sir Percival as you. You see I want the extremity of refinement and earnestness, and the two don't seem to go together in these days. Good morning to you both. Good morning.'

His departure was a visible relief to Mr.

Ardrossan, who said: 'The secret of true happiness, according to some folks, consists in having nothing on your mind and nothing in it. If that's true, Mr. Ambergreen ought to be a happy fellow. But what a man to paint such a subject! Now that he has gone, let me have the pleasure of seeing my picture—that is, if you have done anything to it.'

'Very little. I have laid it in on the canvas. You can get an idea of the composition, but that's all. I can't get on with anything till these things are out of the way. I wish to goodness there were no exhibitions! This working against time is the ruin of all art!'

They went to the canvas on which the ground-colours of the lime-tree picture were carefully laid in, and as Morrison looked at it, he thought, not of the little child of other days, but of the pale, unhappy girl whose seeking after sympathy and friendship he had so mercilessly repelled. What insults he had heaped on her, and how patiently she had borne them!

'I like the suggestion of the picture immensely,' said Mr. Ardrossan. 'The design is simple, but remarkably original, and the colour

promises to be superb. You will make a magnificent thing of it, I can see.'

'I don't know—I begin to be afraid—I shall never——'

'My dear fellow, what can you find to be afraid of?'

'Of not being able to finish it with as much pleasure as I had in beginning it. I may as well confess—in fact, I am horribly vexed with myself, now that I know the lady of the snow-storm was Miss Brooke! Is it not strange? I used to play with her when we were both children, and this field with the lime-tree was our trysting-place!'

'Indeed!' said Mr. Ardrossan, wondering why Miss Brooke had been so silent on the subject of this acquaintance.

'Yes; it was long ago, of course, and we have entirely lost sight of each other; but the recollection was pleasant and very vivid, just the thing to help me in painting a picture.'

'Well; when you did meet again, the circumstances were romantic enough, surely? You had the opportunity of showing yourself a hero, and used it splendidly—you were in luck's way altogether.'

‘The luck was very perverse, then; she knew me, was willing to be friends again, and was leading me to talk of our old acquaintance, and I—you would hardly believe it—was so stupid as not to recognise her, if only by what she said, and, unless I am dreaming it, insulted her by speaking of her as a person whom I never wished to see again, and of her family as disreputable.’

Mr. Ardrossan’s face wore a look of puzzled sympathy. He credited Morrison with a spark of genius, and watched him very kindly: the snow-storm, he thought, must have been a very exciting time.

‘Why on earth should you not wish to see her again?’

‘Because I was a fool! I was afraid I should not like her as I used to do—that’s all. I heard she was very much changed, and I did not wish to have my early dreams interfered with. She used to be the cleverest, simplest, loveliest little maiden that ever stepped!’

‘I don’t know what she used to be,’ said Mr. Ardrossan, ‘and I don’t wonder at your being anxious to keep such an image unchanged;

but, I assure you, most people find her very charming now—I do. She was bright, ready-witted, wonderfully interested in all she saw,—especially in your pictures, my good sir; thoughtful, modest, and unselfish.’

‘Yes, she was unselfish; I was struck by that in the snow-storm. But, confound it, I was an idiotic prig! Still, I never dreamt I was talking to the lady herself; and then she was determined to draw me out; so I went on without the least idea that anything depended on my words.’

‘But you don’t tell me how you happened to have this strong feeling against knowing her.’

‘Oh, I looked on her as a mere worldly fine lady. Two or three of my friends used to meet her sometimes, and I was savage with things I heard them say of her. For one thing, Willoughby was engaged to dance with her at some ball, and she threw him over for the sake of a man with a title, telling a few falsehoods as she did so, with an ease that was overwhelming. So Willoughby said, and then I believed it, and was disgusted; but, now that I have seen her, I know he must have made some mistake.’

‘Of course he must! Falsehood is not in her, and as for passing her life in gaiety and worldliness, you forget that she probably has no choice in the matter.’

‘I know—of course she has not—but I had heard such stories! There was one about her going to Ascot with a lot of women who had been divorced. That, luckily, was a thing I could not speak of to her—but I know now that it was not her fault, if she did go.’

‘Certainly not! you may take my word for that! She has a mother, and a stepmother, and a great many aunts, but every one of them is minus either a heart or a head.’

Morrison shrugged his shoulders. He knew Mrs. Brooke, who had no head—he had seen Lady Brooke, who was certainly without a heart. ‘I do not so much mind having told her that I knew I should not like her, for if I met her again I could easily counteract that by letting her see that I did; but how can she ever forgive me for saying that her relations were disreputable?’

‘It was a pity you said that! It’s so pain-

fully true ! You referred, of course, to the sad story that we all know ? ’

‘ “ The sad story we all know ? ” What do you mean ? I referred to no particular story—I know of none. I was only thinking of her uncle Vincent Raymond, and those disreputable sons of his. You can’t go anywhere without hearing stories of them. ’

‘ Do you not know that Sir Chesterfield Brooke’s first wife was divorced—the present Lady Brooke is not Miss Brooke’s mother ? I can’t remember the story, but it was a bad one on both sides. They are disreputable enough in all conscience ! ’

Morrison’s distress was increased a hundred-fold by this ! It seemed such a wretched thing to have embittered the life of a poor girl who was unhappy already. ‘ And the worst is,’ said he, ‘ that there is no recalling such a speech as that, and no apology can be offered. ’

‘ Write to her,’ said his friend ; ‘ write to her and apologise generally. I will speak to her, too, if I have an opportunity. I should like to bring you two together again pleasantly ; besides, I want my picture. ’

The only composition done in Morrison's studio after Mr. Ardrossan left was a letter to Miss Brooke, which was written again and again, and did not turn out well after all. It was so difficult to be neither too familiar nor too distant. This is what was finally despatched :—

Dear Miss Brooke,—I have only just learnt from my kind friend Mr. Ardrossan that some weeks ago a happiness was within my reach which I have longed for for years, and that, just as it might have been mine, I lost it by talking a great deal of folly. I don't know how I could have been so stupid, and so untrue to my real self, for with all my heart I have always desired to see you again. I do not expect ever to do so, for our lives are passed in very different ways ; but I wish to tell you, if you will for once allow me to speak so, that whenever I think of you it is with the deepest respect and regard, and that, from all I saw of you on the very trying occasion to which I refer, I am convinced that, were I once more to come within the range of your influence, it would be as much a boon to me as of old. Even as it is, you have done me good, for I cannot but remember and admire your gentle patience with my vain, petulant, and most unkind and untrue speeches about yourself. I humbly beg your pardon. I assure you of my most respectful admiration and regard, and though I shall probably never see you, I beg you to believe that you have no truer friend than myself. If hereafter at any time I can serve you, I beg you to look on me as your devoted and faithful servant, and to command me at your wish.

WILLIAM KEITHLEY MORRISON.

CHAPTER XXIV.

To make a sweet lady sad, is a sour offence.

Troilus and Cressida.

It was nearly a fortnight before Morrison received any answer to his letter to Miss Brooke, and then it was only a short note, written in a hand which showed that she was ill. This is what she said to him :—

Dear Mr. Morrison,—Thank you for the kindness which prompted your letter to me. I will not deny that your words pained me terribly at the time, but they were all true. I might say that I am not quite so free to choose how my days shall be spent as I was long ago when I knew you, but that only partly excuses me. I will not say more than that it is perhaps not quite easy for you to judge me. Good-bye. For the sake of old times, I beg you to think a little more kindly of me, and not to distress yourself by imagining that you have hurt me, for I shall try to be the better for your words, and to forget their apparent unkindness. Indeed I forgive you.—I remain your faithful friend,

OLIVE BROOKE.

This letter made Morrison still more uncomfortable than he had been before. He wrote again, but received no answer. Day

after day passed, and each added to his vexation. He could not settle to his work as he wished, for he was tormented by the feeling that he had behaved shamefully to one who had always shown him kindness. That speech about her family haunted him—it was so cruel and so unnecessary; so unfortunate too, for this, his sharpest arrow, was one which he had used in ignorance. What was this story? He was too little in society to know the disagreeable histories with which some of the handsome, well-dressed ladies and gentlemen who are its brightest ornaments are dogged and weighted. The story about Olive's mother might even be a hundred times worse than he imagined it to be, and the cruelty of his words thus a hundred times greater. He wished he knew it. The feeling of uncertainty as to the magnitude of his offence was most uncomfortable—altogether, he was in such a state of disquietude that he could settle to nothing, and he thought he would go and talk to Ambergreen. He did not like Ambergreen to speak of Olive, but he had no other means of information at his disposal, and the sooner he knew the worst the better.

Ambergreen lived in Kensington. His house was a work of art from the attic to the cellars—even the colour of the bricks of which it was built had been carefully selected by the artist, and not so much as a nail was ever knocked into the walls without his personal supervision. Each room was a study in itself, and was fitted up so as to serve as one of a series of backgrounds for forthcoming pictures. Morrison was shown into a mediæval dining-room, with a large oak table whose surface was always well scrubbed with sand. The floor was strewn with rushes ; a wood fire was burning on the hearth, and some ungainly seats were set in a wide chimney-corner, on one of which he sat down, and soon he was so absorbed in his thoughts that he forgot how long he was kept waiting. Presently Ambergreen ran in, palette in hand. He had been painting Mrs. Bertie Warrington as Titania.

‘ But your landscapes ? ’ cried Morrison, when he heard this.

‘ Oh, her portrait will be a landscape,’ said he. ‘ There will be a jungle of flowering shrubs and things behind her, and she will have to sit on a bank.’

‘That is one of the very things I quarrel with you figure-men most about. You paint a lot of figures, and fill up three-quarters of your canvas with them, and then you put an out-of-door background, and think you have done a landscape!’

‘Oh, I’ll do some landscapes with nothing approaching to human interest in them—with nothing living at all in them bigger than a black-bird. I must, for Mrs. Warrington’s husband has given me a commission for one this very morning. Come and tell me if you think I shall make a good thing of her. Be quick, for another beauty will be here in twenty minutes, so we have no time to spare! I must shove Mrs. Warrington’s face out of sight, or the other poor lady won’t do herself justice. It is such fun to see how jealous they are of each other! I stir each of them up to look bright, by subtly well-placed anecdotes against the other.’

‘You said you had painted Miss Olive Brooke?’

‘Yes, young man; and if you had had a proper acquaintance with British Art, you would not have got into such a mess as you have!’

You ought to have known my picture, and then, when you met the lady herself, you would have behaved yourself better.'

'Very true ; but I was not in London. Of course I should have known it if I had been here. What did you think of her?'

'She was a nice, sharp, jolly little girl, with lots of fun in her, and such a face ! I did not make half so much of her as I ought to have done, for a novelist aunt was sitting over us all the time I was painting, and she was bent on putting me in a book ; so I was in a perpetual fever, and afraid to open my lips.'

'I want you to tell me the story about Sir Chesterfield Brooke and his wife—can you remember it?'

Ambergreen put his head on one side and tried to think, looking as he did so more like a wicked bird than anything else, but he did not seem able to recall it. 'I forget,' said he. 'One story of that kind drives another out, and there are such a lot of them. I heard such an amusing one last night—I'll tell it to you.'

'Oh, no ; tell me the one I want—that's quite enough.'

‘Let me see, Chesterfield Brooke—he is rather a bad lot himself—married a Miss Ainsley, one of the Norfolk Ainsleys. She did not really care for him, I believe—yes, now I know she didn’t—I’ve got the story—but her father talked her into it, drove her into it, in fact—he was afraid she was going to marry some poor fellow without a sixpence. Things went on well enough for a year or two, though I don’t believe she ever pretended to care for Chesterfield Brooke—then they found that she was encouraging this old lover of hers to come about her, and meeting him in the park, and all kinds of places. She even went to his rooms; so Sir Chesterfield—he was Captain Brooke then—got his divorce easily enough, and married very soon after; that was partly what made the thing so hard for the poor woman, for he seemed to have his second wife ready before he got rid of his first. Still, when a man gets a wife like that, there’s nothing for it but the Divorce Court—and, by-the-bye, it was worse than I have said—I was forgetting. Her brother shot himself, and she went mad; but Master Chesterfield contented himself with taking another wife—he may have

looked on that as an equivalent proceeding. Now, Morrison, I must let my lady come in—an appointment is an appointment! Good-bye.'

As may be readily conceived, this conversation did not add to Morrison's happiness. He had stabbed a poor girl who was deeply wounded already. When he saw her she was evidently ill and unhappy, and before he left her he had done all he could to make her more so. The position of oppressor of an unhappy defenceless girl is not an enviable one, especially when she is one who has a right to expect kindness from you. He had repelled her friendship, he had apparently twitted her with her mother's disgrace, and he felt wretchedly uncomfortable when he thought of it! All this had come on him because he had talked so imprudently in a railway carriage; but it seemed peculiarly hard that he should suffer thus, for in truth he had only given reins to his tongue because she, whom it seemed so difficult to arouse, had been willing, nay, even anxious, to talk on this one subject, and had so often begged him to say more, that he had yielded to please her. He had yielded, but still he had only spoken half

the truth to her. He had let her know that he owed a debt of gratitude to this little girl of bygone days, for awakening the poetic instinct in him, and showing him a way to escape from the common, everyday kind of life to which circumstances seemed to condemn him. So much had she wrung from him by hard pressure ; but he had kept from her that the aim of his life for years had been to educate and raise himself so far above the station in which he was born that he might hereafter be able to seek in marriage the daughter of a distinguished Indian general without being dismissed with contempt. Up to the age of twenty, this had been his ruling thought. For Olive's sake he had worked like a galley-slave, even at things which he disliked ; for her sake he had shunned the thousand and one temptations which beset the path of youth—his worship of her had deprived them of all power of attraction. When he was eighteen, an old family friend had left him a few hundreds of pounds with which to travel and improve himself, and he had gladly seized on this opportunity of making himself more worthy of her, and had lived and studied in

most of the art-capitals of Europe. While abroad, however, he had seen much more of society than he had ever had any chance of doing in England. He had associated with young men of the upper classes, had sat at the feet of worldly dowagers, and had gradually learnt that he was cherishing a dream, and that long before he, a poor unknown art-student, had lifted his head even high enough to win the notice of his own equals, his old love, Olive Brooke—rich, beautiful, and daughter of a Governor of a Province—would be married to some man so distinguished that he himself, poor unknown artist that he was, would be ashamed to think of his own presumption in ever having raised his eyes or thoughts to her. She herself had once told him that she would wait quietly in her own home till he came to claim her as his promised wife; but, poor little thing, she was only a child when she talked in that way. She had, however, told him another thing which was most certainly true, that before he did claim her he must have done something great—‘must have some achievements.’ Those were her words, and he

perfectly recognised their significance and truth. It was indeed most certain that before he presented himself to remind her of this promise, he must have done something to prove himself worthy of her; and every year showed him more and more clearly how hard it was to do anything that was even good, much less great; and time was so short, and the great picture—the picture which everyone would bow down before, as really good and noble—would not let itself get painted. He came back to England richer in knowledge, but deprived of the strong incentive to work which had never before been absent from his mind. Not, however, till some time afterwards, when he heard of Olive as a Court beauty, wooed and admired by men of rank, and living on the very frothiest surface of London life, did he finally renounce all thought of one day winning her, and even this renunciation was not so painful as the state into which he seemed at last to be driven, of thinking less well of her. Story after story was told to him which made him feel that she was not the Olive for whom he had toiled and thought so much and so long,

and the end was that he drove her from his thoughts and tried to live only for his work.

When Olive met him in Scotland, he had for some time ceased to think of her, except as playing a part in his early life, and it is doubtful whether their chance meeting would have materially altered this decision, if he had not spoken to her so cruelly. As it was, his heart was torn with sorrow and vexation whenever he thought of what he had done, and he felt that he could not be happy until he had made some atonement. What was he to do? He had gone to Ambergreen, not quite hoping to hear anything which would lessen his self-reproach, but desirous at all cost to hear the worst; but the worst had far exceeded his worst imaginings. Her mother had been divorced; her father had not come creditably out of the trial; her uncle had committed suicide; and her mother had gone mad; and to a poor girl, painfully conscious that in the background of her life lurked these ghastly circumstances, he had said, 'I once used to think that she would never overlook the fact that my relations were of humble birth, but

now I am not sure that I could consent to know hers—they are all discreditable !’ Such, to the best of his recollection, had been his words ; they could never be explained away or apologised for, and they had been used to the woman who of all others in the world was the one whom he must ever regard with the most tenderness. He could not forget her pale, suffering face, her timid pleading for his good opinion, and her patient endurance of his scorn. All his old love for her returned, and he felt that he had never really succeeded in banishing it. He did not care to go home—home was only a working place, and he knew that all painting was out of the question for that day, and perhaps for many more. He was attracted to the quarter where she dwelt. He might see her. It was not very likely, but there was always the chance. He walked once round the square and up and down some of the smaller streets. No one was there whom he cared to see, and the house where she lived looked coldly irresponsible to his eager glance of inquiry. After a little more of this profitless wandering, he went into Young Street, and while he was near

the General Post Office, a carriage stopped there. Lady Brooke, pretty, young-looking, and warmly dressed in furs, got out ; Olive—he saw that she was there—sat still. Once he thought he would go and speak to her ; but she looked so pale and ill, and languid and listless, that he had not the courage to intrude on her. He looked at her for a minute or two, while pretending to be occupied with a new kind of boot-lace, then Lady Brooke came back, and the carriage drove away with her into the square. Even after completing the little purchase which had furnished him with an excuse for going into the shop, Morrison had time to follow quickly enough to see Olive being helped into the house by a maid. So she was ill, and he had a large share in making her so.

He walked back to Chaucer Street. When he got there he found that Mr. Ardrossan had been to see him, and had written and left the following note :—

Go out by daylight ! I never knew you do such a thing before ! I came, my dear Morrison, to ask you to go with me to call on Miss Brooke. I told Lady Brooke yesterday that we should do so, for I made sure of finding you in, and willing to pay this visit with me. Unfortunately, it will now have to be postponed, as I am going into the country until after Christmas. We will make our call as soon as I return.—Yours disappointed,

JOHN ARDROSSAN.

Morrison read this with the greatest vexation. 'Such is life!' cried he. 'I have been running half over London, seeking in vain for what I should have had without an effort if I had but stayed at home! But I'll have it still!' He rang the bell with such vehemence that his servant was terrified, and ran to see what could have happened.

'Did you hear where Mr. Ardrossan ordered his coachman to go when he left?'

'To Mr. Ambergreen's, sir.'

'How long is it since he was here?'

'About half an hour.'

Morrison went upstairs, hastily revised his costume, which was of the painter, painty, and then ran to the nearest cab-stand, jumped into a hansom, and promised the man double fare to drive quickly to Ambergreen's. How could he wait until after Christmas to see Olive? He wanted to see her now! By great good fortune, Mr. Ardrossan's carriage was still at Ambergreen's door. Morrison scribbled a few words on a card and sent it in to Mr. Ardrossan, who soon came; and then Morrison, who had such a short while before despaired of ever

seeing Olive again, found himself on his way to call on her. Not till he was all but there did he remember his unhappy speech.

‘Forget it,’ said Mr. Ardrossan; ‘you have apologised generally; behave as if you had never made it. She must be perfectly aware that you would have bitten your tongue off rather than say such a thing if you had known who she was. Here we are!’

How Morrison’s heart beat when the door opened which was to reveal her to his sight! She was sitting in a low chair near the fire, and wore a dark crimson dress. The soft lamp-light made its rich hues glow, and darkened the shadows of its folds. She was pale, and her eyes looked large and sad. Morrison’s quick eye took in all these details at a glance while walking across the room behind Mr. Ardrossan. Lady Brooke had other visitors, who were sipping Mrs. Ullathorne’s best tea out of china cups which were so old and valuable that she always kept them in a cabinet. Lady Brooke was delighted to see Mr. Ardrossan, and was profusely civil to Morrison, but that was because he came in such good

company. Then it was his turn to speak to Olive. Did she blush a little when she shook hands with him? He did not know; he himself was nervous. She greeted him very quietly, but kindly; still, the few words she said seemed to cost her an effort. Was she too ill to say much, or did she not care to speak to him, or had she not spoken the truth when she said that she had forgiven him? Morrison did not know, and for the moment he was quite confused, for before this visit he had no idea how exquisitely beautiful she was.

‘I am afraid you are still feeling the effects of that terrible night in the train,’ said he.

She passed her hand slowly across her eyes, as if to hide her face from him when reminded of anything so painful, and replied, ‘Oh, no; I soon recovered that. Thank you for all you did for me then.’

He wished he had held his tongue; he wanted to say something else, but whatsoever subject he started, languished, after she had replied by a few words. Her hands were lying in her lap; he could not take his eyes off them, for he well remembered that of old he

and she had always sat hand in hand. Then they had always found plenty to say to each other ; now, she would not speak and he could not. She felt the conversation was flagging, but what was she to say ? She did not like to ask him about his work, lest anything should be said about the lime-tree picture ; she could not mention Austerfield, lest she should seem to be reminding him of old times. At last she inquired if he did not know her aunt, Mrs. Brooke, of Harley Street ? and he, remembering what he had said about her relations, lost no time in expressing a strong regard for that lady ; but that subject would not last for ever, and just as he was going to take refuge in the weather, Mr. Ardrossan came to them, and Morrison thought he could not do better than watch how she treated him. She did talk a little more freely to him ; but, then, she knew him better. Two men with titles were in the room ; up to the present time Lady Brooke had monopolised them ; but they preferred the younger lady, and gradually approached her chair. Again Morrison listened and watched. They both paid her a great deal of attention,

and the names of great folks and great houses were tossed about with all the lightness and ease of familiarity; but still Olive, though apparently intimate with these two handsome young lordlings, did not seem to treat them with more distinction than she had shown to his humble self. This was, however, small comfort to Morrison, for he felt himself divided from her by walls of brass. His heart began to feel as heavy as lead. He sighed when he thought what a fool he had been, and of the best that it would ever be in his power to give her—to her it would appear the merest discomfort and beggary.

‘I think we shall have to run away,’ said Mr. Ardrossan presently. Morrison rose heavily. He gave Olive one last look, and then they left.

‘My dear Morrison,’ said Mr. Ardrossan, ‘I am not quite sure that you are the happier for this visit. Are you?’

‘At any rate I am the better for it,’ was Morrison’s answer. ‘I am glad I came, but I must never see her again. I can’t stand it.’

CHAPTER XXV.

I do see

Danger and disobedience in thine eye.—*King Henry VI.*

A heavy heart bears not a nimble tongue.—*Love's Labour's Lost.*

It was many weeks after Olive's return to London before she was well; and even when her health was restored, she no longer seemed able to take pleasure in the amusements which she had enjoyed before. Lady Brooke had made a desperate effort to regain her confidence. She had apologised for having so abruptly disclosed the unhappy fact about her mother, and had entreated Olive not to let her uncle and aunt in Harley Street know that she had done so. She had promised them to keep it a secret, she said, and they would never forgive her for having broken her word. She had only done so for Olive's good, and they must not know it. Olive would give no promise;

she said she required their advice, and must consult them ; but Lady Brooke was tolerably easy about the matter, for they were from home, and she felt that Olive was very unlikely to write letters that would distress her uncle, and before they returned she hoped to have brought the girl to her own way of thinking. Dr. and Mrs. Brooke had been in town while she and Olive were in Scotland ; but Dr. Brooke's health had again given way, and they had gone to Cannes for a couple of months' change. Lady Brooke was still in Kensington Square ; Mrs. Ullathorne had written to announce her desire to return to her own house, and Lady Brooke had not failed to say how delighted she was to hear of this, and that all should be ready for her ; but in her letter she had used these words : ' Olive is better, but I am still very anxious about her ; no one seems able to say what her illness has been, and is ; do not, when you come home, and hear about it, think that she has had a fever, for none of her doctors will admit that this is the case.'

As Lady Brooke expected when she penned this absolutely truthful statement—for of course

no doctor could admit such a thing for a moment—Mrs. Ullathorne decided on remaining where she was a little longer, and thus Lady Brooke gained more time to dispose of Olive's future. She was beginning to despair of her. She was weary of the girl's companionship, and sick of the sight of her sad face. Olive never spoke except to answer a question—took a book to escape notice, but never turned a page—so far as was possible, avoided all society, and was evidently giving her whole mind to something which she did not wish to confide to her lawful guardian, Lady Brooke. Once or twice that lady said—

‘Olive, what is the matter with you? why do you sit and never speak? You never even look up; it is miserable to see you. What can you be thinking of? Tell me; I wish to know.’

‘I cannot tell you,’ was Olive's reply. How she wished her dear Uncle Richard was back again, and well enough to talk to her!

‘Waiting for an answer, you say?’ inquired Olive one day, when a note was brought to her. ‘Oh, it is from Aunt Selina!’ she exclaimed, when she saw it. Lady Brooke did not hear

her words ; she herself had just received some letters which she appeared to consider important. ‘ Aunt Selina is here ! ’ cried Olive ; ‘ she has come back ten days before uncle, to get the house ready for him.’ Lady Brooke’s letters were difficult to deal with, and had made her cross, so she said, ‘ Won’t she make it comfortable for him, poor man ! Picture the wretchedness of any invalid who is given over to her hideous housekeeping ! ’

‘ She wants me to go and spend the rest of the day with her. I am so glad : I want to see her so much.’

‘ You can’t go to-day, Olive ! You must be at home. Write and say that you will go to-morrow. I have a particular reason for wanting you at home.’

‘ I should so like to go at once.’

‘ No ; say you will go to-morrow. I will take you there myself and leave you.’

‘ Please let me go to-day.’

‘ I tell you no, Olive. I have a note which I must answer, and then I will give my reason.’

Olive wrote her note of refusal to her aunt, and Lady Brooke wrote a note to some one

else, and both were given to the messengers waiting for them, but still Lady Brooke did not fulfil her promise. Then visitors came, and it was not until after six o'clock that they were alone, and she said to Olive, 'That note was from Sir John Ellerton. He is in town now. He wrote to ask me if I thought it would be disagreeable to you if he came to pay us a visit, so I have invited him to dine with us to-night. That is why I wished you not to go to Harley Street to-day, for this is the only evening this week I have free.'

Olive was mutely indignant. Lady Brooke stood watching the changes in her face. She felt very uneasy at what she read there. 'I cannot meet Sir John Ellerton!' cried Olive, at length.

'You shall meet him!—I beg your pardon, Olive, but do please remember that I am much older than you, and know much better what is right in such cases than you can possibly do. Let him come here as usual. He won't say anything which you will object to hear. He has promised me that he will not—he will come just as any other friend might do.'

‘ I will not see him,’ said Olive. ‘ If I do, everything will happen exactly as it happened before ! He will assume that, as I make no objection to his coming here, I mean to accept him in the end, and you will, of course, say that my conduct implied it.’

‘ Olive, no ; you do not listen to what I say. I tell you he comes as a friend, and only as a friend ; after his hospitality to us, I do not see how we could refuse to let him do that. No ; he must come, and you must see him. He will be here in three-quarters of an hour. Go and dress. Don’t say anything more. While you are with me, I expect to be obeyed.’

Olive walked across the room with a half-formed project of rebellion in her head. She went to her own room and began to dress as rapidly as she could. She chose the plainest and darkest dress she had. Hardly had she fastened the last button of this, than, clad in a warm dressing-gown, Lady Brooke opened the door. She had misgivings about Olive’s obedience, and peeped in to see whether she had to deal with a steadfastly obstinate stepdaughter, sitting Cinderella-like in work-a-day garments,

or a brightly apparelled damsel willing to be reasonable. 'That dress!' cried she, though an evening dress of any kind was a hopeful sign; 'you might have treated us to something less dingy! What time is it by your watch?'

'Seven minutes to seven.'

'Then you have seven minutes to spare. Change that dress, Olive; I like to see you look nice.'

'It will do very well,' said Olive.

'Oh, no. He won't be here for seven minutes—you had better change it. Put on a white one—come, you have as much time as I have—mine is still to put on;' and so saying, Lady Brooke went away.

Olive had expected this visit, and, when once it was over, she did not lose a moment. She was afraid of Lady Brooke—of the maid, of everyone, and had no time to lose. She snatched up her hat and a loose fur-cloak, ran downstairs, put on her hat and cloak just as she got to the house door, opened it cautiously, for she heard the servants talking in the dining-room, and then hastened to the gate. She arrived there just a moment before Sir John

Ellerton's carriage drove up. She saw him spring out as she was hurrying across the square; she ran up Young Street, and did not breathe freely until she found herself in the midst of the crowd of people who were making their way up and down the High Street. She got into a hansom almost immediately, and with all speed drove off to Harley Street, and not till she was well on her way did she remember what an omission she had made in not leaving the traditional note of farewell pinned to her pincushion. She resolved to send one of the Harley Street servants back in the cab to set Lady Brooke's mind at rest. The freshness of the air revived her, the boldness of her own course acted as a stimulant, and she felt happier than she had done for months. 'I am quite certain I have done right,' thought she. 'If I had allowed him to come as usual, what could he have thought but that I meant to change my mind, and, poor fellow, he is far too good for such ill-treatment?'

Mrs. Brooke was in her study with 'eyes commercing with the skies,' and a great heap of manuscript before her. 'My darling Olive!'

said she. ‘What a pleasant surprise! How are you? But I need not ask—I never saw your dear face look so rosy and pretty: and how I have been worrying myself about you! Thank God, without need, I see!’

Olive’s face was flushed with the excitement of her flight from Kensington Square. She looked unusually well and beautiful: no wonder that Mrs. Brooke was reassured. ‘I am so glad uncle is better,’ said Olive, forgetting her own troubles.

‘He is much better, but the great thing is to him keep so. I am reversing the usual order of things—the nightingale female always comes ten days after the male; but I have come ten days before your uncle, to see that all is comfortable for him, only I have spent four of them on the way.’

‘But you have been writing all day, aunt!’ said Olive in a tone of gentle reproach.

‘So I have, but I don’t write every day. I was tempted this morning, and yielded—you see, I have some very important work in hand; and the house is so deliciously quiet, now that there is hardly even a servant in it, that I

shall never have such a good opportunity of getting on again. I will see about the house to-morrow—I have five days left.'

'Let me see that all is got ready,' said Olive, who knew that temptation might more than once again prove too strong for her poor aunt.

'Yes, I shall be much obliged if you will; but I want you to help me in another way. Sit down, Olive dear, close by me—you have come at the very moment I most wanted you.'

'And I wanted you!' cried poor distressed Olive. 'You must advise and help me, for indeed I need it.'

'Indeed I will!' cried Mrs. Brooke; 'but, before we say another word, just read about half-a-dozen pages of this manuscript for me. I have a most particular reason for wishing you to do so now.'

'I came because I wanted to talk to you about something very important. Can you spare a few minutes? I am very unhappy.'

'My darling, yes; but I thought we might get done with the manuscript before dinner—I am dining late on purpose—pack it up to-

night, and look at it no more!—I know if it is not packed up, and sent out of the house, I shall find a hundred things to do to it. It ought to go to Messrs. Chatterley to-night to get it out of my way.'

'What is it that you wish me to do?' asked Olive.

'It is a novel for the "Quixotic Magazine," and I believe they will take it. It is of great consequence to me that they should; but the worst is that, in order to paint a character really well, I am afraid I have made it rather too like your Aunt Ullathorne. I did not intend it to be like her, but somehow it has slipped into being an exact portrait—at least I am afraid so; but I have a guilty conscience about it. You must please tell me what you think, Olive, for your uncle would be very angry if anyone said it was drawn from her. Begin here.'

Olive took the manuscript, but soon exclaimed, 'Aunt, you can't possibly let this go: "She was the widow of a wealthy merchant, and the ponderous character of her furniture, and the depth of the pile of her carpets, bore

witness to his wealth and her own strong feeling for heaviness.”

‘Well, take a pen and correct as you go along; make him a stockbroker—that’s disguise enough.’

‘Oh, no, I’m afraid it is not.’

‘But I can’t have any very great alterations! Read on.’

Olive read on, but soon cried, ‘I am sure it won’t do to leave this; everyone will know that you are thinking of poor Aunt Mary: “She contradicted her fellow-creatures as the only means at her disposal of keeping up a conversation. Perhaps, in her heart, she would have preferred to bring a sledge-hammer stroke to bear on each subject which was started; but as, from experience, she had found that her opponents seldom rose again after this blow had been dealt to them, she had adopted the method of contradicting at large, thus goading friends and enemies alike to renewed speech, which she met by renewed contradiction.”’

‘Oh, I really can’t take that out!’ cried Mrs. Brooke. ‘It is such a good bit, and so exactly like Aunt Ullathorne!’

‘But that is why you really ought to take it out.’

‘Oh, but it is sure to be just as like a great many other cross old women, and I don’t suppose she considers herself contradictory. No; don’t let us be so very particular! Read on.’

‘Then, I am quite certain she will recognise this,’ said Olive, after reading a page or two more: “‘She had only two pleasures in life: one was this delight in contradiction, the other was a strangely grim joy she experienced in buying for herself places of burial. Whenever she saw a pretty cemetery, she always bought herself a fragment of it, went to see it two or three times as her last long resting-place, and then chose another. And yet no one was ever so anxious to live to an extreme old age as she! If you had told this woman, whose life seemed so miserable, that she could prolong it by going once a year barefooted to John o’Groat’s house, she would ungrudgingly have performed the required task. And this desire to live long was not the result of any uncertainty as to where or how life beyond the grave might be spent; for she was possessed of a certain knowledge that she was among the

chosen few who at the last would stand by and see most of those whom she had known on earth sent away as unworthy to share in the happiness which would be hers.”’

‘Aunt Selina! It is impossible to let this go. It is not right to speak of one of uncle’s sisters, or of anybody, in this way! I don’t like it at all!’

‘But it is so like her!’ said Mrs. Brooke. ‘She really would enjoy seeing her friends and relations consigned——’

‘It does not seem right to put such things in a book!’ said Olive. ‘Don’t be vexed with me for saying so.’

‘It mayn’t be quite right,’ said Mrs. Brooke, ‘but you must admit that it is very good. That one character quite makes the book; it is splendid. Don’t say I must take it out, or you will make me ruin the novel.’

Olive was firm.

‘It is just the kind of character Mr. Chatterley’s reader likes,’ pleaded Mrs. Brooke. ‘I must leave it in till he has seen it. Suppose I leave it in for the reader, and modify it as it goes through the press?’

‘But things that are left in for a while are apt to be left in altogether ; besides, I am very much afraid that softening that character won’t do—it ought to be taken out entirely.’

‘That’s quite impossible ! That character is the most important one in the book ; she does all the mischief in it and brings about all the trouble. I’ll do something to make it unlike your Aunt Ullathorne—I promise you.’

Dinner was ready, and they rose to go. The talented lady folded up her manuscript and said, ‘Olive, I know this book is good, and I am unusually hopeful. I am afraid I shall never be a Classic, but I do not see why I may not rise to be a Standard Author.’

‘At all events, your books are widely read,’ said her niece kindly.

‘Ah, my dear, that signifies very little, I fear ; for, as that naughty uncle of yours says, “An author must indeed be a great fool who can’t find an equal one for a reader !” What is that ?’ she asked, as a servant gave her some money.

‘Change from Martin’s bill, ma’am,’ said the maid, and went.

‘Don’t you count it?’ asked Olive, seeing her aunt tumble the loose silver into her purse.

‘Oh, no; I never count the money they bring me; it makes so much unpleasantness if it happens to be wrong.’ Involuntarily another saying of her Uncle Richard’s rushed into Olive’s mind: ‘When the devil wishes to ruin a woman, he puts a pen in her hand.’ Much suffering had wrung from him this change in the old formula, and she began not to wonder.

‘When dinner is over, aunt,’ she said imploringly, ‘you will spare me a little time, won’t you? I am so miserable!’

This time Mrs. Brooke seemed to understand her appeal, and said, ‘And have I been making you think of other things when there was something you wished to say? Olive, I am so sorry.’

‘After dinner will do,’ replied Olive; but all through dinner she saw her aunt looking penitent and anxious, and when at last they were alone, Mrs. Brooke said, ‘Olive, you are ill; I see you are, now that you are not flushed. Do tell me what is the matter.’

‘I want to come back to you! I love you and uncle, and I can’t stay with Lady Brooke.’

‘Dear child, she is your mother.’ Mrs. Brooke said this so simply and naturally that Olive almost believed that she did not know otherwise.

‘She has told me that she is not! She has told me most dreadful things about my own mother. She says I am disgraced by belonging to her, and must marry some one to hide my real name; so she is trying to make me marry Sir John Ellerton, whether I wish it or not. I am here now against her will; she said I was not to come; that was why I wrote that excuse you got. I came away in spite of her, because I found that she had invited Sir John to dinner.’

‘I am very glad you did, darling,’ said Mrs. Brooke, without the slightest hesitation. ‘You did quite right, and, what is more, you shall stay here altogether, now that you have come! You shall not go back to her to be ill-treated!’

‘You are sure I may come?’ said Olive faintly.

‘How can you ask such a question? Your uncle and I both look on you as our own dear child.’

Olive burst into tears. She was so unused to kindness and affection, and had for so long looked on herself as an outcast and a disgrace to all connected with her, that a few loving words quite overcame her. ‘Oh, but I must not come here,’ she sobbed. ‘She told me that my being with you dragged you down, that you kept your own children away from home lest they should be partakers in my disgrace, that I had no real home anywhere, and that no one looked on me as anything but a burden.’

‘God forgive her!’ ejaculated Mrs. Brooke. ‘She is a very wicked woman! You shall never be with her again.’

‘But am I not a disgrace and injury to you? Might I really come to you?’

‘My darling, yes; you are our own.’

These few words soothed Olive inexpressibly. ‘I can bear anything now,’ said she. ‘It was the feeling that there was not a house in all the world where I was not unwelcome that made me so wretched.’

‘My poor child!’ cried Mrs. Brooke; ‘and you came here with your heart full of this, and you let me set you down to read my manu-

script ! What a selfish wretch you must have thought me !—but indeed I did not dream that there was anything serious. Is this what has made you so ill ?’

‘ I think so. I have thought about nothing else since she told me. I feel so wretched about my own mother. Aunt Selina, I have seen her, and I feel certain she was innocent.’

‘ You have seen her ? But I am not sure she is alive.’

‘ Yes ; she is alive, and I have seen her. She came one day to the window of our house, and looked in at me—I did not know who she was at the time, but I have been thinking of all these things, and now I know and long to see her again.’

Mrs. Brooke took Olive’s hand in hers and said, ‘ Dear child, I am so sorry for you ; but please do not let your mind dwell on this.’

‘ But I can’t help doing so. The thought is never absent from my mind, and I must think of it even more than I do,’ continued Olive in great excitement, ‘ for I want to prove her innocence.’

‘ Ah, my darling, this is no subject for you

to meddle with! Your stepmother was a very cruel woman to let you know about it. Turn your thoughts in another direction—a child ought not to have anything to do with pain of this kind.'

'Am I to desert my own mother's cause because it will be painful to me to know about it? I should not wish to know about it if I believed her guilty.'

'Why do you think her otherwise?'

'I don't think—I know! Her face was enough for me. No one with the noble face she has, could act untruly in any way.'

Mrs. Brooke shook her head.

'Will you tell me the story, then? I am not a child, and may hear it, and whatever you tell me I shall believe—I should not believe what Lady Brooke said.'

'Dear Olive, I do not know the story. It happened before I married your uncle, and he can't bear to talk about it! Once or twice I have asked a question, but he always begs me not to mention it. It must have affected him terribly.'

'But if you do not know the story, aunt,

why do you shake your head when I say my mother may be innocent?’

‘Because I have heard enough to prove that she was not—and she was tried, so it was proved in a Court of Justice that she was not. Olive, dear, it is terrible for you, I know, but you must leave this as it is.’

‘Leave it as it is!’ cried Olive wildly. ‘I should go mad if I believed as you do!—The only thing which stops my going mad is the hope I have of putting her right again with the world.’

‘But if you did put her right with the world, dear, I am afraid that you would put a great many other people wrong!’

Olive’s eyes filled with tears. She had not thought of that. ‘May I talk to uncle?’

‘Yes, dear, no doubt you may—if it would be any comfort to you to do so, I am sure you may; but please do not say anything to him until he is better.’

‘And I may stay here?’

‘You shall never leave us again.’

‘Thank God!’ exclaimed Olive. ‘I don’t know the story, but whenever I look at Lady

Brooke I feel that she betrayed my poor mother ; I could read that in both their faces, when I saw them together.'

'Olive, you are wrong,' said Mrs. Brooke, who, though ignorant of the whole story, knew a little more of it than she would admit to Olive. 'Remember, you have nothing whatever to go on but fancies !'

CHAPTER XXVI.

The shame fell long ago,
The sorrow keeps increasing.—ROBERT BROWNING.

OLIVE was up betimes next day. She awoke with a sense of light-heartedness that she had not felt for months. She was once more with her own people—she had slept in her own bed, could see her own little pictures and bits of decorations on the walls as soon as the shutters were opened, and could go to her own drawers and take out familiar old garments left behind her as unsuited for the inspection of the great lady who had so suddenly appeared and claimed her as a daughter. She dressed quickly, and ran down to her uncle's study; the maid was dusting it when she entered. 'This room is ready for the master, Miss Olive, let him come when he will,' said the girl; but Olive knew better. No one was so particular as Dr. Brooke

about the trifles which made up the sum of all the comfort that he could call his own. She rapidly began to arrange his tables as she knew he liked to have them—books in one place, scissors, penknives, and string in another ; and then she made a list of things which were wanting. After which she went through the other rooms, and had set all the work which was really wanted a-going before her aunt came down. A letter from Dr. Brooke was lying on the breakfast-table, and much Olive longed to hear its contents. She ran to meet Mrs. Brooke with it in her hand. ‘Read it,’ said she ; ‘never mind me, tell me how uncle is. Aunt, since you said I might come back, I have felt quite a new creature.’

But as Mrs. Brooke read the letter, her face fell. She read and re-read, and finally muttered, ‘It is very strange ! This is the most disagreeable coincidence——’

‘What is a coincidence?’ inquired Olive. ‘Let us be above coincidences ; I hate them !’

‘My dear child, how I wish your uncle had not written this letter ! It upsets all our nice plans. Listen to what he says. “I am

afraid from dear Olive's letter to you, which came after you left, and which I opened, that she is not happy and wishes to return to us. I long to have her back quite as much as she can long to come ; but, Selina, be wise, and do not encourage such a thing if she speaks of it to you. I will tell you why. If I were rich, I would take her back in a moment. If I were even in good health, so as to be sure of being able to work for her, she should come ; but as it is, with my health in such an uncertain state that any day may find me unable to maintain even my own wife and children, I must not do Olive such an injury as to take her away from those who are bound to provide for her. If she leaves them to come to us, they will desert her ; I shall be expected to provide for her, and, dear Selina, I dare not undertake this charge. Tell Olive what I say, with my love. Ask her to be patient, and to make the best of things for a while. Assure her that Lady Brooke will neither take her to India when she goes, nor will she stay very long here ; so that if Olive can but bear to remain where she is a very little longer, things will soon return to their old state, without the pain

and annoyance of any quarrel between her and her present guardians, who will then hand her over to us as before, but will still feel that she has a claim on them if my health should break down, and she should need their help. Tell her that this is my only reason for wishing her to stay with Lady Brooke now—that I look on her as my own child, and so long as I live she shall always have a home with me. I wish I were rich enough, or well enough, to be able to write differently. God knows the comfort the child has always been to me, and how I long to have her back again.”

Olive's eyes were full of tears ; but she was not weeping because of her own disappointment, but because he wrote so kindly about her, and so gloomily about his own health. Mrs. Brooke soon made her see that he wrote thus from an excess of conscientiousness, and then she said, ‘Aunt, how different you and uncle are from my stepmother, and how delightful it is to be with people whom one can trust ! Now, if she had received that letter, she would not have read it aloud to me, but by a hundred artful devices she would have got out of having me with her.’

‘Always be straightforward, Olive; half the misery of this world would be spared if people would but behave honestly.’

‘Yes,’ said Olive; ‘I believe myself I should get on far better with my stepmother if I acted more for myself and did not let her meddle so much; I think I will take a stronger line.’

Dr. Brooke’s kind letter made Olive feel that she could bear anything. She would go back to Kensington Square and stay with Lady Brooke until she went back to India. She could do that cheerfully, and more too, if her uncle wished it. So, to Mrs. Brooke’s surprise, her tears ceased to fall. She was helpful and even gay, and after a final survey of the rooms, to see if anything was wanted which her aunt was likely to forget, she made ready to go. ‘Good-bye, aunt,’ said she. ‘Tell uncle how thankful I am to him, and promise me not to forget to take out all the Aunt Ullathorne bits.’

‘I promise,’ replied Mrs. Brooke sadly; ‘but what a pity it does seem! You might just as well make me promise to have half a dozen good double-teeth pulled out! Good-bye.’

As Olive opened the door, Mrs. Brooke cried,

‘Oh, wait a moment—you can do one thing for me before you go—I did not like to mention it last night when we had so many other things to think of, but it is something I do so want a good opinion about.’ As Mrs. Brooke spoke, she produced from a drawer in her writing-table a rather well-worn copy of her last novel. ‘Tell me, dear, what you think of the appearance of this book! I brought it away from the library on purpose to ask some one. You see how loose the back is, and how bent and worn the corners are; has the novel been a great deal read, or does it look like that because people have got out of patience with it, and have thrown it across the room in disgust? Don’t laugh at me, I do so wish I knew.’

Olive examined the injuries of the back and corners with a critical eye, and taking these in conjunction with the aspect of the margin of the pages, which she declared showed that they had been held in a steady continuous grasp, she gave her verdict in favour of ‘much hard reading,’ and departed, leaving her aunt in high spirits.

The pleasure of being in Harley Street again, and of working for her uncle, had so filled Olive's mind that not until she was nearly in Kensington Square did she remember that she had left it the night before without much ceremony of leave-taking, and that, in all probability, her reception would not be a very pleasant one. The maid who opened the door pursed up her lips to hide a smile, but could not hide her twinkling eyes.

'Is Lady Brooke in?' asked Olive.

'Yes, Miss Olive; she's in the drawing-room.'

Slowly Olive went upstairs, and slowly she opened the drawing-room door. Lady Brooke was, as usual, sitting very near the fire. Her back was turned to the door. Olive stood in some hesitation, wondering what she had better say first. She felt that Lady Brooke must know that some one was there, but she did not look round. She was wrapped in a shawl of Lady Ellerton's knitting—Lady Brooke had no fine feelings which would make it unpleasant to wear garments which could not fail to remind her of painful occurrences—

her fine feelings all went to securing her own comfort.

‘Good morning,’ said Olive; ‘I am here.’

Lady Brooke turned and looked at her from head to foot with an air of cold but searching interest, and said, ‘Be so kind, then, as to explain your conduct.’

‘I went because you invited Sir John Ellerton here to dine. I did not wish to meet him.’

‘If you are to leave the house in this way whenever my visitors do not happen to please you, I think it is a pity that you did not stay in Harley Street when you were there. You may be able to lord it over your aunt, but I do not intend to be dictated to by you. I have already posted a letter informing your father of your secret and sudden departure from the house last night without so much as leaving a message for me.’

‘You have! You will distress him very much!’ cried Olive regretfully. ‘You need not have been quite so quick about it.’

‘Oh, he expects to be distressed by you.’

Olive felt this taunt bitterly. She knew

what Lady Brooke meant. Suddenly she remembered her lately-formed resolution of taking a bolder and stronger line, and cried, 'I will write to my father myself. I will explain everything to him.'

'I forbid you to do anything of the kind,' cried Lady Brooke. 'I will write to him—he is my husband.'

'He is my father,' said Olive.

'He wishes to be kind to you and make no difference between you and his other children,' replied Lady Brooke, who strongly desired to remind Olive that there was a difference.

Olive winced, and said very humbly, 'And I wish to obey him in everything I can.'

'Are you going to live here or in Harley Street?'

'Here, unless you prefer to send me to Harley Street.'

'But are you to live with me and set me at defiance? What about Sir John Ellerton? Will you see him if I wish it?'

'Yes, if you really wish it.'

Lady Brooke looked so surprised that Olive made haste to add, 'I must tell you that I shall

take the very first opportunity which offers itself to make him thoroughly understand the nature of my feelings towards him.'

'I wonder,' replied Lady Brooke angrily, 'whether the nature of your feelings will change when I tell you of something which has up to the present time been kept from you. You shall hear it; but before I say more you must promise me solemnly not to repeat what I am going to tell you to anyone whomsoever.'

'I do not wish to hear it,' said Olive firmly; 'I do not want to be told anything, unless I may be allowed to consult Uncle Richard about it.' She was still adhering to her resolution to be straightforward; this course was entirely in harmony with her own character, and it had the effect of thoroughly disconcerting her step-mother, who tried, however, to put a good face on the matter, and said, 'Don't be so idiotic, Olive! You get hold of a few fine phrases, and think you settle everything if you only repeat them in an impressive manner! You can't consult your Uncle Richard about what I am going to tell you—not unless you want to kill him, I mean; you know what a

precarious state of health he is in. Wait till you hear what it is, and then you won't be so anxious to tell it.'

'I don't want to hear it. You have already told me quite enough to make me miserable for the rest of my life! I will hear no more.'

'But you can hardly steer your course properly without knowing this! You ought to know it.'

'Tell it to me, then.'

'Yes; but promise to keep it secret.'

'I will not know it on that condition.'

'Please yourself!' exclaimed Lady Brooke angrily; 'but I am afraid that a time will come when you will have to know it, whether you like or not.'

'I will wait until that time comes,' said Olive. She was certain that, if Lady Brooke desired to extract a promise from her, it must be one which it would be to her disadvantage to make; so she showed no sign of yielding.

'But have you no curiosity?'

'Some; but I won't give that promise.'

'Then we will speak of something else. You wish to remain here?'

‘I wish to do exactly as you and my father like best about that.’

‘Good girl! Well, we wish you to stay here; but then we wish many other things which you do not seem so ready to perform; however, I will say no more on this subject. Oh, stay! One thing I must say, and that is, that so long as we remain together, we ought to live on terms of friendliness. Olive, it is not my fault that we seem to live so uncomfortably. I have a great wish to see you happy, though you don’t believe it. Indeed it is true. Think, yourself, how many things there are which I might do which would be pleasanter to me than living here with you. You know I have invitations which I decline. I might go abroad, but I stay here entirely for your sake, because your father wishes you to be taken into society and acknowledged by us.’

Olive looked uncomfortable. Lady Brooke continued: ‘I am sure I do not wish to complain of having to do it; but, Olive, it is not a very agreeable life for me, now that you are so determined to regard me as your enemy.’

‘I beg your pardon, I am sure,’ said Olive,

who felt rather guilty ; ‘ I am sorry if I treat you unkindly.’

‘ Then, be a little different. Believe what I say when I tell you how anxious I am for your happiness. I may not always take the way to secure it that you prefer, but you must own that since I have been with you I have had no other object in view.’

Olive began to think that there was a great deal of truth in this, and sat down near Lady Brooke and tried to talk to her as she used to do.

While she was still sitting dressed in her out-door garments just as she had returned from Harley Street, a letter was brought to her. The address was ill-written and blotted, the envelope was sealed with coarse wax. She did not know the handwriting, and uttered some exclamation to that effect as she turned the letter round, and for a minute or two she was so occupied in puzzling herself as to who could be the writer that she never noticed how interested her stepmother was also, or how eagerly Lady Brooke’s eyes were fixed on the sheet of paper when once it was drawn from the cover. ‘ What can this be?’ cried Olive,

reading the first four or five words. Lady Brooke was reading them too. Olive started and looked up, and, though she did not think that Lady Brooke was reading the letter, she thought she was dangerously within reach of it and moved her position a little, and then read, ‘33 Mulberry Street, Bethnal Green,—If Miss Olive Brooke would like to see some one who can give evidence which will establish her mother’s innocence, she must, on the day she receives this, go——’ When Olive had read as far as this she rose to go and finish her letter upstairs.

‘Stay where you are, Olive,’ said Lady Brooke; ‘I want you here, dear, as soon as you have read that letter.’

‘I should like to take off my bonnet——’

‘No; wait a minute.’

Olive felt obliged to stay, but could not resist reading more. ‘She must, on the day she receives this, go to the Thames Embankment, and be at Cleopatra’s Needle precisely as the clock strikes four. There she will soon see a person aged about fifty, dressed in brown merino, with a red petticoat, brown jacket, and

a black bonnet trimmed with black and red ribbon, and flowers. This person will have a Bradshaw's Guide in her hand, by which Miss Brooke may know her. Miss Brooke must come alone, also with a Bradshaw's Guide in her hand to secure recognition ; but if she brings a companion with her, her journey will be in vain.' Then the writer lapsed into the second person plural. 'As, however, you may be afraid of coming so far, or have some difficulty in getting out, I will give you one more chance of meeting me. If you are not able to come to the Embankment by four, come to the Carmelite Church, in Church Street, at eight o'clock. It will be open then, as to-day is Friday. A woman will be kneeling at the right hand side of the church, at the very end of the third bench from the door. That she may know you, kneel down by her, and put your handkerchief on the desk before you, and lay your gloves cross-wise on it. She will whisper your name to you. Have no fear of her. She will either take you outside or stay in the porch as you wish, and will tell you enough to prove her power of helping you to the knowledge you want.

Absolute secrecy is required. Above everything, Lady Brooke must know nothing of this. Perhaps Miss Brooke is not aware what a dangerous woman the so-called Lady Brooke is—the present writer warns Miss Brooke to beware of her. She also begs Miss Brooke not to make any attempt to come to the address given at the top of my letter. Miss Brooke may write to me at Mulberry Street if she is unable to come to either place, but you must not come to my house. If Miss Brooke neither writes nor comes to one of the places named, the present writer will know that she does not care about the good name or happiness of her ill-used mother.—HANNAH DEANHAM.’ Olive read this with great but suppressed emotion, and much anxiety to escape observation. Lady Brooke had, however, especially during the last minute or so, seen more than one word which excited her curiosity to its utmost stretch. Fragments of several sentences had met her eyes, and two or three of these had seemed to refer to some appointment for that day, and, besides this, other things had struck her. She did not want to interrupt Olive so long as the

letter was in her hand, and there was the least chance of seeing more, but when she began to fold it up and put it back into its envelope, Lady Brooke said, 'My dear! I wish to see that letter.'

Olive shook her head and answered, 'Oh, no; I could not show it to anyone! I am asked not to do so.'

'But I demand to see it! I have your father's authority for treating you as I should treat a child of my own, and I insist on your giving it to me! Olive, it is of no use to refuse, for I tell you I will see it!' and so saying, she rose suddenly in much agitation and excitement. Olive rose too. Was Lady Brooke going to take it from her by force? She feared so; and just as her stepmother was about to clutch it from her grasp, Olive threw the letter into the very centre of one of the red-hot fires which Lady Brooke delighted in, and in a second it was beyond the power of anyone to read its contents. Lady Brooke turned as white as a sheet with passion, and said, 'Olive, you will repent this! Now I know what to think of your professions of obedience! This time you have

gone too far,' and so saying, she swept out of the room. She did not appear at luncheon. Olive ate her dismal little meal alone. She did not trouble herself about that, or about having offended Lady Brooke—she was in a fever of excitement to know how to contrive to keep this appointment. If she had not run away to Harley Street only the day before, she might have gone off without saying anything, but she was afraid of behaving in the same way two days in succession. Lady Brooke, however, seemed determined to give her every facility. A little after two she went out, and Olive, who watched her from the window, saw her walk rapidly out of the square. On this she herself ran upstairs to dress; for, though Lady Brooke was going to dine out that evening alone, it seemed wiser to keep the earlier appointment; besides, by so doing, she left herself one chance more, in case of failure.

She had never been to the Embankment. She fancied that Cleopatra's Needle was somewhere near Westminster Abbey, and, if so, she felt quite able to find her way to it. She would, for the first time in her life, avail herself of the

Metropolitan Railway. On her way to her own room, she met Mrs. Ullathorne's rather antiquated housemaid. All the servants liked Olive, but they adored Lady Brooke, who was wise in her generation, and secured her own comfort by gaining their goodwill. 'Harriet,' said Olive, delicately hovering about the subject next her heart, 'have you ever been to the British Museum?'

'Yes, miss. We went once, sister and I, and we lost our way in ever so many great passages—what a keeping clean that place must take, to be sure!—and we got to a great round room where hundreds of cross-looking people were sitting reading, which, when we saw it was a studious place, we turned back and went amongst some stuffed beasts—rhinocerhouses and wild elephants.'

'And have you been to Westminster Abbey? and Cleopatra's Needle?'

'Oh, yes, Miss Olive, I have, so to speak, seen most things; but I must own that I have only half seen the Needle, for I had most unfortunately left my spectacles at home that day, so I couldn't see to read the inscriptions on it. They do tell me they are very curious.'

‘Very, I believe,’ said Olive; ‘but how did you go to it?’

‘By train to Charing Cross, and just walked along the Embankment. I like the tombs in Westminster Abbey best—it’s beautiful to see the great gentlemen all lying there with their hair all in curls!’

Olive had heard enough: she would run to the Metropolitan Station in High Street, and get down to Charing Cross some time before four. What a blessing that Lady Brooke was out! She dressed herself quickly—snatched up the very Bradshaw which had guided her on her Scotch journey, and speedily left the house.

CHAPTER XXVII.

What contrast here !
Repose, and solitude, and healthy ways.—R. BROWNING.

OUR unlucky artist in Chaucer Street was, at the present time, in a state of mind that was anything but favourable to the production of works of art. Day after day he moved big canvases to the light, or made preparations for impairing the beauty of large, well-strained pieces of white paper ; but, that done, the work in contemplation advanced no further. He was out of love with himself, with pictures, and with everything. What a happy fellow he had thought himself until he learned that the young girl to whom he had been able to render some slight service in that unlooked-for imprisonment at Blair Angus was no other than Olive Brooke ! Until the day of that discovery, he had found no difficulty in adhering faithfully to

the wise resolutions which he had made while abroad ; but it was hard indeed now to acquiesce in the conviction that she could never be more to him than a beautiful remembrance, and that it would be folly to play with the dream of her ever becoming his wife. Until then his work had been, as he intended that it should be, happiness enough for him ; until then the unloveliness, and smallness, and poverty-stricken appearance of his own home and all around it had never grated on his artistic sense : they were part of his scheme of life, and he had never counted on living otherwise. It had been his wish to sit lightly on the world, and to have as few cares and responsibilities as possible, so that nothing might interfere with the calm of mind essential to the production of good pictures. He would have a dwelling-place which he could shut up when he went into the country, without caring whether rust and moth did their worst, and with nothing to tempt thieves to break through and steal. He felt now that he had succeeded admirably so far as thieves were concerned—but what would a fair young wife say to such a home ? He had set out with the

conviction that no one could serve art with perfect fidelity who was not free, as regarded the best part of his work, to paint exactly what he liked and with what amount of pains he liked, without caring whether such pictures, which would be the full expression of his most cherished thoughts, found purchasers or not. He thought, therefore, that every man who believed himself born to be an artist ought to fix a certain sum as that on which he could live in sufficient comfort to bring out the best that was in him, to strive by all fair means to gain this competence, and, that done, to dismiss money-making from his mind for ever. What elaborate selfishness all this appeared to him now! He had, up to this time, kept himself true to his theory easily enough; there had, indeed, been a certain pleasure in the extreme monotony of toil to which he had pledged himself, with its one well-defined ambition—that of doing good work. What were solitude and austerity of life to the enthusiasm of youth, all on fire with the changeful splendour and evanescent even though everlasting beauty of nature? Science as well as religion had had its martyrs; why should not

the new science of aspects, the exact knowledge of the beauty of natural phenomena, claim the devotion of a life? But no such devotion, even though keeping well on the safe side of martyrdom, would bear thinking of for a moment together with the idea of a wife born and bred in luxury. It would be impossible to ask such a one to share such a life, and cruel to test the sublime unselfishness of the sex at the expense of his peerless Olive. But, in spite of himself, the dream had come back to him, and the conflict of realities along with it. He could not but take stock of himself, of what he possessed, of what he had done, and of what more he was likely to do. Of his place as a painter he could scarcely judge, even if he had one; but he knew that his balance at the bank was mightily insignificant. At the age of eighteen he had found himself an orphan without a single near relation. His father had made a great sacrifice to give him a good education, and had left him all he had, which was five hundred pounds and not another penny. Three months later, Mr. Keithley had left him five hundred more, with, as before said, the express condition that he should spend it in

travelling and improving himself. He invested the money bequeathed to him by his father in the safe and unfluctuating Funds : this, too, was part of his plan ; he would not fret his soul with share lists, or rises and falls in the market, but would commit his nest-egg of peace to the guardianship of Our Lady of Threadneedle Street. This done, he felt quite rich and moneyed, and, as it seemed to him that this little bit of self-sacrifice was one step towards gaining both his mistresses, he was happy and hopeful. At that time, indeed, his future life seemed to unroll itself in bright colours before him. Painters whose opinion he valued spoke in high terms of his chances of professional distinction. Mr. Keithley's money had provided him with means to travel, and see and study and sketch beautiful things of all kinds, without any feeling of culpable self-indulgence or extravagance ; when it was all spent he would come home and work harder than ever. After his return to England he had several successes, was elected Associate of the Old Water-Colour Society, sold some pictures in the R.A., and got some commissions ; in fact, was as happy as

could possibly be, until he again saw Olive, and again could not help allowing her image to flit before his eyes. It was a pity ; but somehow his plans, his theories, his prim mapping out of the future—his little arrangements, so to speak, with fortune—fell to pieces completely ; a new planet had swum into his ken ; another desire beside that of attaining unknown heights in art, and one inconsistent with it, had taken possession of his mind. Life had become all at once not worth living, unless he could win a prize for which he saw no chance of being able to equip himself so as even to become a competitor ; for he well knew that, of all avenues to wealth and fame, that in which his steps were set was the longest, the most laborious, the least captivating in the eyes of the world.

No wonder his painting did not prosper as usual, and that subtleties of colour and form, though ever so well planted in his memory, became tangled and confused in his drawing. He thought of Byron's wish to have 'something craggy to break his mind upon,' which, in his own case, would be a good, solid bit of natural fact to copy to the very life. He threw down

his brush and exclaimed, 'I'll go into the country at once and forget her !'

His faithful cat could not understand him. His conduct was so very unlike what she expected from him. She jumped on his knee and curled herself up into a soft ball. 'Puss,' said he, you and I are not half so happy together as we used to be.'

Pussy might have told him to speak for himself. She, with her fair portion of all his meals, with a place by his warm fire, and a fat sparrow of her own catching, twice or thrice a week, had no complaint to prefer against life's dealings with her ; but, not to seem disagreeable, she diligently kneaded him with her feet and purred.

'A telegram for you, sir,' said his servant, entering in dismay. Morrison read the pink paper, and its message was this : 'Gale from the north-east. Heavy sea on outside. Stone seat swept off East Pier. Schooner ashore on Scaur. From Cuthbert Pickering, St. Hilda's, to W. K. Morrison, Esq.'

'I'll go !' cried Morrison. 'I am doing less than nothing here. I told Pickering to

telegraph to me whenever there was any chance of a tremendous gale ; I'll go at once.'

He brought his portmanteau into the studio, and, having crammed it to the last gasp with painting materials, began to wonder what he was going to do about taking some clothes away with him—he always thought of painting things first. 'It won't do to go to St. Hilda's without lots of clothes to get wet in !' thought he. 'How those waves do come down on one ! The nastiest way of looking at a sky that I know is through a great, dirty, yellow-coloured mass of water that is just going to fall on one !'

Having, somehow or other, packed a sufficiency of clothes to get wet in, he drove off to the Great Northern, and arrived there just in time to take his ticket and telegraph to Mrs. Pickering to make ready for him.

'I have done right,' said he. 'Work out-of-doors is out of the question, but I'll get some good study at St. Hilda's. If this wind holds, the sea will be magnificent, and I can't afford to spend my life in pursuing a shadow.'

He was determined to drive Olive out of his head. He read all the way down. How

cold and wintry the journey was, and how difficult it was not to think of that other railway journey not three months before!

It was midnight before he reached St. Hilda's, and the station was nearly dark; no one was there but two or three officials, and they were only awaiting the arrival of this last train to shut the doors and go home to their beds. St. Hilda's was a terminus, and, except during the fishing and bathing seasons, trains were never crowded. When Morrison stepped on the platform he was met by a friendly cab-driver who was an old acquaintance of his. 'I suppose there are not many people here now that the weather is so stormy?' said Morrison.

'Bless you, sir, no! There's not been a job by the mail train for the last month.'

Morrison resigned himself to be a 'job,' and was driven along the quay-side nearly as far as the pier, for on his first visit to St. Hilda's he had chosen Mr. Pickering's lodgings as giving him the best opportunity of studying fishermen and fishing-boats, and the splendid old red houses on the opposite side of the harbour, under every varying effect of light

and atmosphere. As he drove along by the water's edge, his eyes rested in delight on certain well-remembered landmarks of a place which had a great hold on his regard. There were the lights of the old town, and the larger lamps which marked the line of the long flight of steps to the church at the very top of the wind-swept cliff. The town was lost in rich black shade, but the church above stood out squat and dark against a wild and storm-rent sky. Large clouds were hurrying by, or spreading thin films over a frosty, cold moon. He heard the boom of the sea as it beat against the pier. He felt another man, full of excitement of eye and mind; and when the carriage stopped, if he had not had some regard to the proprieties of life, he would at once have made his way to the end of the pier to see if he could not get a peep at the wrecked schooner; but Mr. Pickering was smiling and bowing at the bottom of the steps, and his wife, kindly soul, was smiling from ear to ear at the top, and a great fire was blazing in the sitting-room, and on a footstool in front of it was a tabby cat. Mrs. Pickering showed her to him and said:

‘We’ve setten the poor cat afore t’ fire, sir, because that was how you always liked to have her. I reckon she’ll remember you. Oh, please, sir, never think nothing of your luggage; our Cuthbert will see to that, won’t you, Cuthbert, honey? and Mr. Merrison, sir, just you sit down and get something to eat while it’s warm and comfortable.’

It was warm and most comfortable, and Mrs. Pickering brought it herself, and in the fulness of her joy at having a lodger whom she liked back in her house in the very depth of winter, when no one else ‘was let,’ chattered and waited on him at the same time. What a supper she had provided for him! First came a dish of ham and eggs, and then some chops, and after that appeared a chicken roasted to a turn. ‘I know you like a nice tender young chicken,’ said she, ‘and after that you’ll have ——!’

‘Good heavens! don’t kill me, Mrs. Pickering.’

‘Kill you, sir—no, Lord love you, I’ll not do that, but you are tied to be hungry after your long cold journey.’

‘Are there many visitors here?’ he asked, by way of a grim joke, for he still heard the great waves crashing down on the east pier, and the wind moaning outside.

‘Visitors! Bless you, no, sir! There’s not a visitor in the place but you and a family next door.’

‘It was very good of Mr. Pickering to tell me about the schooner coming ashore. I was determined to set off at once, as soon as I heard it was there.’

Mrs. Pickering’s face fell. ‘She has gone clean to pieces, sir; but there’s a brig run aground in the harbour—maybe she’ll do?’

Maybe, indeed! How Morrison wished for daylight!

Next morning he rose early. The fresh sea air made him feel light and happy, the thought of the view which lay before his windows stimulated him as nothing in London could have done, and he ran to pull up his blind with much of the joyful flutter of childhood when on the edge of a new delight. St. Hilda’s was divided into an old town and a new one, separated by the harbour and river, and con-

nected by a picturesque bridge which was always being opened to let some strange old-fashioned craft pass through. Steep cliffs rose on both sides of the river, and both were densely crowded with fine old red-tiled houses which rose tier above tier from the water's edge to within a few feet of the top. The only difference was that the cliff under which Morrison's small abode nestled was surmounted by rows of modern lodging-houses, on which he was only too glad to turn his back, and that opposite to him was crowned by a magnificent fragment of an abbey; a stately manor-house, much of which had been built of stones pilfered from the monastery; and one of the strangest and most picturesque churches in the kingdom. As Morrison drew up his blind, he saw it quietly brooding over the crowds of gravestones which lay around in such profusion as to whiten the top of the cliff. Below, the habitations of the living were just beginning to look rosy and bright in the sunshine, and with one consent all the chimneys in the place were sending up their little shafts of smoke and plainly declaring to all the world that it was now the breakfast

hour at St. Hilda's. How lovely the sun-tinted smoke was, and how exquisitely beautiful the vision of the ruin above, silver-grey in the frosty morning mist! But suddenly he saw another sight which filled him with a still keener delight. The brig which had come ashore, and which he had till this moment forgotten, was lying just under the east cliff—if he had had the arranging of it himself, he could not have put it in any place where it would have come better in a picture which he had long wished to paint of the town from that side of the river. He hurried over his breakfast, for he knew that the brig would not be there long. He must work like a horse all day, and then, if Providence would but send him the sight of a fine sky, his picture, with that brig in the foreground, would do. The storms of the preceding days had cleared the air, the day was bright, and the cold intense. The sea had not yet gone down, and a broad belt of snowy white marked the limit of the dreaded Scaur, as the floor of rock was called which ran out to sea for a good quarter of a mile, on one side of the harbour. All this was covered now. He made ready to

go out ; but just as he was taking a last look at the state of the tide, he caught sight of a table which was being placed in the bay window of the next house. It was not so much the table that interested him, as the fact that a glass of pure water was set on it, and this in the month of January seemed to betoken the neighbourhood of a brother artist. ‘ Confound the fellow,’ cried he, ‘ he is going to pounce on my brig ! Who would have thought of any artist being here in such weather as this ! A drawing-board was then propped up on the table, but the hands which performed the deed seemed to be very small ones. Then came a colour box, and the artist sat down ; but still Morrison saw nothing but the hands aforesaid and a fragment of wrist and sleeve, but the wrist was a very slender one and the sleeve was of peacock blue ! ‘ Some poor girl must be going to make a mess of that subject ! ’ was the thought which ran through the arrogant masculine mind. ‘ Well, she won’t find it easy ! Those houses, for one thing, will give her a peck of trouble.’ As he crossed the road, he cast one upward glance at the sketcher, but he saw nothing but

her shining dark hair and patiently bent head, and in another minute the heart-kindling picturesqueness of the scene before him had driven everything else out of his mind.

‘How long will that brig be there?’ was the question he put to the first sailor he met.

‘Not very long if they are wise! She’ll soon strain herself all to pieces if she stops there. I should think they’ll lose no time in getting her cargo off her, and then I make no doubt but she’ll float.’

‘How did she come to grief?’

‘She missed her course a bit, and ran aground directly—it was done last night, sir. Maybe you saw her?’

‘No. I was not here. What is her cargo?’

‘Wood. She’s just come from the Baltic. They’ll soon unload her and get her off when the tide flows.’

That, as Morrison knew, would be at seven; so he hurried across the bridge to the east or opposite pier, resolved to work till dark. When the sun set, it did so in a flood of orange and crimson, which translated the houses before him into a beatific vision.

He was more happy than tongue can tell in doing his best to seize on this bit of heaven-sent beauty, and he walked home in grateful thankfulness.

He had forgotten all about his sister in art ; but just as he was about to cross the road to go in, he chanced to look up, and standing at the window of the house next to his was a girl looking out. The room was full of a blaze of fire-light and it illumined her face. It was a very charming face, but it seemed to him that he had seen it before.

‘ Mrs. Pickering,’ cried he, for he met her as he went in, ‘ who is the lady who is lodging next door ?’

‘ She is an artist, sir, and a pretty good one by what our Cuthbert tells me, and rely he is a capital judge of what a pictur ought to be !’

‘ Do you happen to know her name ?’

‘ Her name is Keithley, sir—Miss Rosamond Keithley. She has been here better than a month with an aunt.’

Rosamond Keithley ! How strange ! That was the name of a niece of his dear old friend’s. He had seen her once or twice at his house,

but he chiefly recollected her as the delighted partaker of a pleasure he always allowed himself when he went there—that of looking over Turner's England and Wales, one of Mr. Keithley's most treasured possessions. 'Does she paint, do you say?'

'Almost as hard as you, sir—I am sure, if it was me, I'd tire.'

'And is she pretty?'

'She is that pretty, sir, you might take and frame her for a pictur!'

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Work apace,
Honest labour bears a lovely face.—DEKKER.

‘SHE is that pretty, you might take and frame her for a pictur!’ had been Mrs. Pickering’s words when speaking of the beautiful young lady who was lodging next door; but Morrison was so full of the beauty of that brig that he never thought of anything else for a fortnight. He made ‘our Cuthbert’ take down a bed, and thus converted an upstairs bedroom, with a good sky-light, into a very fair studio, and set to work at once to transfer to canvas as much of the charm of the scene which had taken possession of his mind as he could. He worked from daybreak to dusk, carried on with one burst of enthusiasm, never flagging, and hardly allowing himself time for a breath of air or a mouthful of food. As for Olive, he had no

time to think of her, so absorbing in its intensity was his desire to make his own of what he had seen. He never once thought about how he was succeeding—he only knew that he was very happy. From time to time he ran out to study some detail, and then back to his work, as to the greatest joy the world could give him.

Interruptions were few at St. Hilda's, but in order to have none at all, he had locked his door. Perhaps he was rather afraid of his talkative landlady. One day, however, he heard a knock given with much sacrifice of knuckles, and, looking round, he saw that a note was being pushed under his door. After a while he condescended to pick it up, not without accompanying the action by one or two remarks not intended for the ear of the public. It was a pretty-looking note enough, and written by a lady. He opened it, not at the moment liking it any the better for that fact. The letters he received from ladies were usually appeals for help and guidance in the thorny paths of art, and he, alas! felt his own feet bruised and failing at every turn. He read the note:—

Mrs. Reuben Keithley presents her compliments to

Mr. W. K. Morrison, whose arrival in St. Hilda's has only recently become known to her. As an old friend of her family, Mrs. Keithley hopes Mr. Morrison will call and see her. She herself has not the pleasure of his acquaintance, but her niece well remembers seeing him when she was a child, and on a visit to her late uncle in London. If Mr. Morrison would kindly call about three o'clock to-day, Mrs. Keithley would esteem it a great favour. She is very anxious to have a good professional opinion of her niece's sketches in water-colours. Miss R. Keithley has lately devoted much time to drawing, and her ambition is to make as it were a profession of it. This, however, Mrs. Keithley feels, ought not to be encouraged unless her talent is a very decided one, as otherwise such a decision could only be productive of disappointment.

‘One can't escape worry even at a place like this!’ cried he, ‘but I ought to go.’ He had once or twice already vaguely thought that it was his duty to show some civility to these people next door—that is, if they were related to his Mr. Keithley; but then he was not by any means sure of this, and did not know how to find out. He scribbled a line to say he would be there at the time named, and then tried to ignore the break in his work.

Mrs. Reuben Keithley was an invalid lady, kind in manner and pleasant of face. Miss Rose was out, of which he was glad, seeing that he had to pronounce an opinion of her work.

‘I have not told Rose that I have asked you to come,’ said Mrs. Keithley; ‘she is so very anxious to paint, that I should have been afraid to have let you see her sketches in her presence, lest you did not like them.’

‘Excuse my asking if there is any necessity for her doing work of some kind?’

‘Oh dear, no—no necessity at all! She has nothing from her own father; but the Mr. Keithley you knew, left her a hundred a year, which is a very tidy little fortune for a girl, and she has a great many kind relations with whom she lives in turn; but they all detest the idea of her meddling with art professionally, and lead her rather a bad life about it. What she wants to know is, whether she has talent enough to justify her in making a strong effort to gain her point.’

‘But why not go on as she is doing now?’

‘Oh, her love of painting is really a passion, and she does not believe that her work will ever be of any value unless she sets about it as a man would do, and takes her chance of all the ups and downs and severe criticisms of a professional career. She tells me, Mr. Morrison,

that she will never hear a word of truth about the things she does so long as she is only an amateur, and never can know whether she is right or wrong.'

'There is a great deal of truth in that, and I dare say she likes the excitement of making her way.'

'She does; but all the Keithleys hate it—they are furious at the idea of such a thing, and the end will be that they will make themselves very unpleasant to her. I am a poor, weak-willed invalid—she likes being with me, for I let her have all her own way.'

The drawings were decidedly good for an amateur. Morrison, however, saw some great faults in them, and was honest enough to say so.

'You would be doing my niece a very great kindness if you would repeat all this to her—I am sorry to say that my poor head will never carry a quarter of what you have told me.'

'I shall be delighted if I can be of the slightest service to Miss Keithley—I ought to be, I am sure, considering the name she bears.'

‘Thank you ; that’s how I said you would feel ! She will be here in a minute. The fine day tempted her out, but she has only gone to Rastwick by the cliffs ; she went at two, and said that she would walk back by the Scaur.’

‘The Scaur !’ cried Morrison ; ‘I hope not ! —how terribly foolish !’

‘“Foolish !” Why?’ exclaimed Mrs. Keithley, in great alarm. ‘There is no danger, I hope ? The tide is all right for her—it won’t be high till half-past five.’

‘Yes,’ said Morrison, bethinking himself, ‘but it’s so dreadfully slippery there !’

‘Oh, she won’t mind that—she is very sure-footed. She ought to be here soon. Let us see if she is in sight. She said I was to look out of the window and watch her going up the Scaur-ladder, and along the side of the cliff there, at a quarter to four. That’s why I asked you to call now, Mr. Morrison : I thought she would just come in at the end of our talk, and hear what you have to tell her about her drawings without the nervousness of being present while you were examining them.’

‘Her work is beautiful,’ cried Morrison ;

‘but I must not stay to see her now—I have an engagement—excuse my going away so suddenly—I must—I’ll run in again, if you will allow me.’ He went away as quickly as he could ; for if that foolish girl had carried out her intention of going to Rastwick Bay by the cliffs and walking home by the Scaur so as to arrive at the Scaur-ladder at 3.45, the latter part of that plan could assuredly never be carried out by her, for at 3.45, the way which led to the Scaur-ladder would be deep under the water. At least, he thought so ; for as he ran along the road to the boatman’s house, he began to feel uncertain about everything. It is so difficult to calculate the ebb and flow of anything so full of change as the tide, when life or death depends on your doing it accurately. Two days before he had been on the pier just at high water, and for some reason connected with his work had made a note of the time, and now with whirling brain he tried to add on the proper number of minutes per tide, so as to discover at what hour it would be high to-day. He was right—that time was half-past five.

The boatman was not in ; Morrison ran along

the quay hoping to find some sailor, and still thinking and counting up chances all the way as he went. There would be no difficulty in rescuing her if he could but reach her with a boat, but it was now ten minutes to four, and by this time she must, if on the Scaur, be hemmed in by the tide and in an agony of fear. This was the special danger of the Scaur. You were caught in a trap unawares. There was a way down to the shore from the cliff opposite, by what was called the Scaur-ladder—a long flight of steep steps which bridged over the space between the pier and the cliff—and another about a mile and a half farther on, at Rastwick Nab. Both these points, however, jutted into the sea, and both were reached by the tide and deeply covered by it long before the mile and a half of smooth grey flooring which lay between them showed any sign of danger. None but those familiar with the place could know that all escape by either of these ways would be cut off more than two hours before the tide seemed even to be getting high on the shore between them. How could a stranger know this? Your landlady would tell

you that it was dangerous, and you went there and saw a mile or two of this glistening grey expanse stretching away before you, broad, level, and unbroken, except by an occasional chasm or ledge in the rock, or tangle of seaweed ; and here were fossils, St. Hilda's headless snakes, and brittle belemnites, and pools full of the sea's fallen stars, as the Scotch so prettily call the jelly-fish, and waifs and strays of carnelian and jet—you might spend hours in such a spot and not see half its treasures. But once too late for one place of exit, you were too late for the other also, and between the two was nothing but the greedy sea on the one hand, rushing open-mouthed at its victim, and a range of sea-cliffs which rose perpendicularly to the height of nearly three hundred feet and hemmed you in to your fate.

Morrison thought of all these things till he was sick at heart ; and though it was not ten minutes after his abrupt departure from Mrs. Keithley before he had found a man and coble, he counted the time by hours. The man nodded his head and said there was no time to lose, but that the sea was running rather

strong, and he must have his mate with him. Morrison made no objection—he himself was not much of a seaman, and all that he contributed to the undertaking was presence of mind and goodwill. He had run along the quay-side without seeing a sailor; his newly-found man, David Smales, dived into a house and brought out a dozen directly, and in less than a quarter of an hour after leaving Mrs. Keithley's, Morrison and two of them were pulling hard to the harbour's mouth.

‘She will be safe enough for some time to come?’ said Morrison interrogatively.

‘Yes, and maybe not know she's in any danger,’ said one of the men. ‘That's how they are! I've known us men row till we were fairly melted away, and just find the folks we had gone after a-sitting on a rock admiring the fine prospect, or a-picking up pretty shells on the shore, and never thinking how near they was to being drowned.’

‘That's better than getting into a great fuss and most bursting their hearts with fright,’ said his mate. ‘In a general way, when folks gets to this end of the Scaur, and finds the

water's up, what they takes and does is this : they sets off running as fast as their legs can carry them back to Rastwick Nab, and thinks that they will have time to get back that way, and that's just what they never have, for the water's high there quite as soon as it's high here.'

'It is so,' said David Smales; 'that's the way Mr. Anderson got hisself drowned two years gone February. He was running as hard as he could, and we were rowing out to save him if he would ha' letten us, but he never looked round, for all we kept hollerin' to him. It's a true saying that twice as many folks drownds themselves as is ever drowned.'

'But was he drowned when you were so near with a boat?'

'Yes; we could neither get up to him nor make him hear; if he had run to us instead of from us—but them as is born to be drowned won't die in their beds! It was a bad job.'

Outside the harbour it was very rough indeed, and more than once Morrison thought the coble would be dashed against the pier or swamped; but the men well knew how to

manage her, and Morrison soon saw that there was no cause for anxiety.

A strip of the Scaur was still uncovered, but it was rapidly becoming narrower ; no one was there—at least, Morrison could discover no one, nor could the lynx-eyed sailors. He tried to peer into the clefts and crannies of the great lowering cliffs, but he saw nothing that resembled a figure. The coble was now in smoother water, but the great white waves were leaping up against the Scaur-ladder and dashing through the opening beneath it. Perhaps Miss Keithley had changed her mind about walking home this way, and at this very moment was safe and happy in her own home. This was just one of those cases where it had been necessary to act immediately if at all. If he had waited ten minutes more to see if she did not walk leisurely home by the usual everyday path, and she had not appeared, it would then have been too late to go off in search of her, and all chance of saving her would probably have been lost.

‘I see no one,’ said Morrison ; ‘she can’t have come this way.’

The men, too, said they saw no one; but all three declared that it was necessary to go quite to the extreme end of the Scaur before they could be sure that no one was there. They now pulled a little more slowly, and were able to speak to each other.

‘Do you see that hump of rock astarn there, sir?’ inquired one of the sailors, nodding in the direction which he wished Morrison’s eyes to take.

‘Yes,’ replied Morrison.

‘Eight men were saved there, all by the sense of one dog.’

‘How so?’ asked Morrison, giving one quick look at this ledge with a history, and two long ones all around, to try to discover Miss Keithley.

‘They were in a schooner which had got on the rocks, sir, and it was driven right up there close to that great rock that projecks so, and all the crew was on deck looking for nothing less than death, and expecting she’d go to pieces every minute, when a dog they had with them just walked along the bowsprit, and made a bold jump on shore for life, and some-

how got on that ledge, and what that poor four-footed dumb creature had done, the men thought they might manage to do too, and did it; but when they were on the rock they hardlins knew whether they would be washed off or not.'

'They were saved, I hope?'

'Aye, they were saved; but they had to stop shivering where they were all the night. It was better nor twelve hours before anyone found out they were there, and when folks did see them the only way of getting them off was to haul them up the cliff. There was a terrible sea on for days. The men were most perished with what they'd gone through. My wife, poor woman, seed them all being marched up the street, each propped up with a man to help him along, and she gav' them their fill of hot coffee, and set them afore t' fire, and when I went in she said, says she, "Davie, honey, look here; there's the dog that's saved eight men!"'

All this long story had been told piece by piece, whenever the management of the coble left David a chance of using his tongue; but

for a minute or so, before he came to an end, Morrison had been looking at something, and suddenly he and the men also cried out in the same breath, 'What is that?' For they had all three caught sight of a black something on a rock five or six feet from the ground, which might be a crouching figure. One of the men had a glass in his pocket and bade Morrison take it and look, but the point was otherwise determined, for she—it was a woman—rose to her full height, and waved a white handkerchief. She wore a brown dress, and this had been the means of hiding her from their sight until they got nearer, but how was it that she had not seen them? One of the men answered this question by saying, 'Poor thing, she has not been able to look about her for crying, I reckon! Well, I'm sure I had made up my mind that she had gone home the other way and that we'd just had our bit outing all for nothing.'

'Row your hardest!' cried Davie. 'Don't let us wait till the water's even with the rock, or we'll maybe be mashed to matchwood in five minutes!'

Morrison, in the presence of these two men who knew how to cope with an enemy of such terrific force, and who did it so quietly, felt himself a poor useless creature. They knew the danger of this expedition a thousand times better than he; but they had calmly accepted the duty of doing their best to save a fellow-creature, and did not make the least merit of it.

‘Now, sir,’ cried one, ‘I’ll jump out and steady the boat a bit, and you’ll get out and fetch the lady. Me and my mate must stick by the coble, or we’ll lose her. Don’t waste one moment you can help.’

He did not lose a moment. He ran the twenty yards or so to the cliff where Miss Keithley was. Poor girl, she had climbed up as far as she could, but her farthest was much below high-water level. She was trying to get down to come to him, but was benumbed by cold and fear; for an hour or more she had been perfectly aware that she stood face to face with death. He helped her down; she never spoke. He half dragged her to the coble, which the force of the sea rendered almost unmanageable, and which in unskilled hands

must have been stove in by the rocks in a second. He never knew how he got her in. Once inside, she looked up in their faces and said, 'Thank you, and thank God!' and then she covered her face with her hands and sobbed convulsively.

Now came the worst struggle of all, against the full strength of the incoming tide; but the men prevailed, and bravely fought their way to the harbour mouth. Miss Keithley sat quite still, possibly aware that there was still some slight degree of danger, more probably thinking only of the narrow escape she had had. As for Morrison, danger or no danger, he felt that he could have trusted himself anywhere with those two men, whose strong, resolute, hard-set faces delighted him so. And the whole town of St. Hilda's was full of men like these: men with no knowledge but how to guide a boat through deep and angry waters, who won their daily bread by almost daily danger, who risked their lives for others freely and nobly; oft-times dying the death of heroes, but seldom being heard of beyond the limits of their own town.

They were close by the landing-stage now,

and Morrison was giving his whole mind to steering the boat in with precision. As it glided to its place, he saw Miss Keithley looking uneasily at him. She seemed very ill, her lips were blue, and her face deadly pale. Still, she wanted to say something.

‘What is it?’ he inquired kindly.

‘My aunt,’ she said faintly; ‘she is such an invalid. She must not be told about this; help me to keep it from her.’

He nodded, admiring her thoughtfulness, and then he began to help her out of the coble.

She turned towards the men, who were rubbing their foreheads with their handkerchiefs and shirt sleeves, and looked as if she wanted to wait to speak to them.

‘Not to-day!’ said Morrison; ‘you shall see them to-morrow;—I will take you to see them at their own homes,’ he added, for he saw that she was not inclined to be hurried away from them now without expressing some part of her gratitude, though she was evidently unequal to any more excitement. ‘I promise I will take you,’ he said, and made her go.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Some that smile have in their hearts, I fear,
Millions of mischiefs.—*Julius Cæsar.*

WE left Olive Brooke on her way to the Metropolitan Railway Station, hurrying with all speed to secure the evidence of a woman who professed to be able to restore her mother's good name. She almost ran when once she had shut the hall door, but scarcely had she got to the top of King Street when she met Lady Brooke, who had in reality been watching the two northern exits from the Square for nearly an hour. She had seen enough of the letter which Olive had that day received to show her that some meeting was in contemplation which it would be highly imprudent not to put an end to at once. 'You here, dear Olive!' said she sadly, as if all feeling with regard to that young lady's recent misdemeanour had departed,

except the pain of wounded affection.
'Where are you going?'

'Oh, nowhere particular; I just came out,' stammered Olive, with very rosy cheeks and much confusion.

'You are quite sure that you had no particular object in coming out?' said Lady Brooke, sweetly—so sweetly that it almost seemed as if Olive might have confided every detail of her errand to her stepmother, without fear of exciting any other feeling than sympathy.

Again Olive stammered—she was not an adept in the art of falsehood. 'Quite sure,' she said; but she did not look so very sure, after all.

'That's right! Then, if you are quite certain that there is nothing else you wish to do, come with me to a shop round the corner. I was just on my way back to ask you to come and help me to choose some trimming for that old grey dress of mine. I am very glad I met you! By-the-bye, Olive, you are rather a naughty girl to walk out in this way! You know I don't like your going about alone.'

'I know,' replied Olive; 'but now and then

you must let me do it. You were out, and I don't like having a servant with me.'

'Still you really ought to have some one with you. Don't do it again, Olive.'

Olive held her peace, for she knew that that very night she intended to go to the Carmelite Church, in the dark, and quite alone. She had, she feared, lost all chance of keeping the first appointment, and must keep the second. What a blessing that woman—whose name, to her great astonishment, she found that she had already forgotten—had given her this second chance of seeing her! To-night she would have no difficulty in going out. Lady Brooke was to dine in Leinster Square at eight, and Olive would have ample time to get to the Carmelite Church after her departure. Feeling, therefore, easy on this point, she showed no vexation at being thus carried off to a draper's shop, and, when there, threw such an air of heartfelt earnestness and interest into all the questions under consideration, that Lady Brooke began to think that she could not have come out with any other object than that of spending an idle half-hour in the open air.

‘I declare,’ cried that lady at length, ‘we have spent a whole hour in this shop! Do you know it is actually four o’clock!’ Four o’clock, and at this very hour the writer of that letter was waiting for Olive at the appointed place!

‘My head aches!’ said Lady Brooke wearily, as she walked homewards. ‘They do keep those shops so hot: I wish I had not come out, it is so horrible to have to sit through a long dinner when one’s head aches!’

Olive began to tremble a little lest she should again be disappointed, and said, ‘It is not far to Leinster Square; that’s a good thing at all events.’

‘Oh, no, the distance is nothing; besides I can send you in my place if I feel worse.’

‘Oh, please don’t do that. I couldn’t go out alone, and then I have hardly spoken three words to Lady Strathspey in my whole life!’

‘It was very rude of her not to invite you, and if I go to-night I intend to make her aware that I think so—I shall be able to do that somehow—but if you did go, you wouldn’t have to go alone. Your Uncle and Aunt Raymond are invited, and they said they would call

for me at a quarter to eight. How terribly we feel the loss of that carriage !' Lady Brooke had sent back Dr. Brooke's carriage in case Mrs. Brooke wished to use it, and very angry she was at having to give it up.

The moment they were at home, Olive persuaded her stepmother to lie down on the sofa and rest. She did not wish to appear too desirous of getting rid of her, but secretly trembled with anxiety lest she should stay at home. 'I'll go and leave you,' said she. 'If you sleep a while, you will feel better.'

'I sleep !' cried Lady Brooke ; 'I am in too much pain to do that ! Don't leave me, dear. I hate being alone when I am ill.'

The truth was, she feared to let Olive go out of her sight lest she should steal away to confer with some enemy. Olive felt that she had better stay, so she sat down in a corner out of sight and tried to lay her plans for the evening. Come what might, she was resolved to keep this second appointment. Even if she were sent to dine at Lady Strathspey's in her stepmother's place, she would still keep it ! Lady Brooke lay quietly on the sofa, and from

time to time Olive inquired how she felt, and sometimes she felt better and sometimes worse, but when seven o'clock came she said, 'I think I'll make an effort to go,' and went to her room to dress. Much comforted by this, Olive also went to dress. She would have preferred to make no change in her attire, but dared not depart from any daily custom. In about half an hour, the two ladies came downstairs together; but just as Olive was about to obey a summons to go and eat her lonely little dinner, rejoicing in the thought that in another quarter of an hour her stepmother would be gone, and that she herself would have nothing to do but to throw on her ulster and hat, which were now lying ready in a dark corner of her bed-room, and go too, Lady Brooke said, 'After all, Olive, I'm afraid I can't go! The moment I leave the sofa, the pain is as great as ever; besides, it is so absurd to make myself miserable. Everyone there would far rather have a nice bright girl like you to look at and talk to, than a headachy old married woman. You go, Olive; you are ready.'

'Very well,' replied Olive, who knew that

it was in vain to resist, and who had devised a bold scheme for the attainment of her wishes, while sitting for two hours by firelight.

‘You don’t mind going, dear?’ inquired Lady Brooke searchingly, for she could not be quite sure that her fugitive glimpses of Hannah Deanham’s letter had supplied her with a version that could be absolutely depended on.

‘I’d much rather not go,’ began Olive; but, looking up, she saw that there were no signs of yielding in her stepmother’s face, so she most judiciously concluded with, ‘but of course I’ll go with pleasure, if it will save you any pain.’

‘Thank you. Yes; I really could not bear it.’

Under the white cloak which Olive threw over her dress she contrived to secrete a dark one, thin enough to go into a small compass, and then she returned to Lady Brooke, who had once more taken refuge on the sofa, and was too ill to be observant.

‘There they are!’ cried she presently. ‘Run down, Olive, or your Aunt Raymond will get out and begin talking to me and make you all too late.’

Olive obeyed with the greatest alacrity, for time was of the greatest importance to her ; but as the door of the carriage was shut after her entrance, she screamed loudly, for the man had shut it too quickly, and had pinched her finger. This accident had been of her own contriving. She had made up her mind that it was better to go through life, if need were, with a slightly injured finger, than to fail to do what was of such vital consequence to her own mother. She had played her part thoroughly, and the tip of her finger was so much hurt that she could hardly restrain her tears.

‘ You had better go back, darling,’ cried both the Raymonds, in great distress. ‘ You can’t possibly appear amongst a number of strangers.’

‘ Oh, I think I can,’ said Olive, who did not want to go back. ‘ It will be better before we get to Leinster Square. At any rate, I don’t like to give in without making an attempt to bear it. Suppose I go as far as Lady Strathspey’s house with you ; and if my finger is better I’ll go in, and if not, your man will be so good as to take me home again.’

‘Brave Olive!’ cried her Uncle Vincent

‘Poor child,’ cried her aunt; ‘how sorry I am! I can see what pain you are in.’ For Olive really was suffering sharp pangs, and expressed her anguish by various contortions. ‘It would be absurd to punish yourself by spending all these hours in a strange house when you are in such a state. You had much better go home! We must take you on with us now, for we are a little late, but don’t attempt to go, in—go home, dear.’

‘If you really think I may, aunt——’ began Olive.

‘Of course you may. It would be absurd to do anything else. Let Robert drive you home, and then send him off at once for a doctor. Or would it not be better if your Uncle Vincent went back with you?’ But Olive would not hear of that. No sooner had the Raymonds left her, than she said, ‘Robert, please stop at the Carmelite Church on your way back. I want to go into it for a minute or so. Drive quickly, please.’

‘Young Miss wants to make some private profession of faith,’ thought he; but it was all

one to him what she professed, he had nothing to do but obey. The Raymonds had been a little behind their time, and it was a quarter past eight when she reached the church ; but a quarter of an hour would make no great difference, her correspondent would surely allow as much grace as is accorded at a dinner. Olive had already thrown her dark cloak over her light dress. ‘Wait for me, Robert,’ said she ; ‘wait just there, round that dark corner.’ Her intention was to bring the writer of the letter out of the church, and to ask her to sit in the carriage with her while their conversation lasted, and thus she hoped to escape all observation or interruption. She went into the church. It was nearly dark, and was quiet and silent. No service was going on ; no one was kneeling on the third bench, either at the right end of it or at the left. Some few persons were kneeling in other parts of the church. She approached each of these in turn. Three of them were men, two girls, and there was one old woman. To be quite sure that she neglected no possible opportunity, Olive sat down by the old woman and went through the prescribed formula. For

this purpose she had taken a pair of dark gloves with her, but they produced no effect on the kneeler, and, convinced that she was not the person of whom she was in search, Olive rose to go nearer the door. There was no change in the aspect of that part of the church since she had gone away, no new person had entered; and, though she stood watching for some time, no one came. She went to the third bench and sat down, arranging her handkerchief and gloves as she had been bidden to do, and then once more she waited—not hopefully now, but with eyes heavy with tears. It was very bitter to her to fail. She sat half an hour, and each moment that she stayed there the consciousness of her dear mother's perfect and entire innocence became a more and more distinct and firm conviction. She felt absolute reliance on it, and trusted also in its being one day declared to all. Her tears fell no longer. She would wait and hope for the coming of that day. Still, she longed for the revelation to be made now. But, alas! none came; one by one, those who had been in the church when she entered departed, and at last she felt that it was in vain to

wait any longer. Not till she was nearly out of the church did she feel the pain of her finger. It was hurting her terribly, and had been doing so all the time she had been there, but the intensity of her thoughts had made her altogether unconscious of it. 'If it hurts like this all night,' thought she, 'I shall not be able to close my eyes. I will go and ask the doctor what to do for it; he is sure to be able to stop the pain a little.'

Lady Brooke's doctor lived in Young Street; Olive told the coachman to drive there. The doctor was in, but the servant said that he had some friends dining with him; still he was sure if Miss Brooke would wait a moment he would see her. The pain was so excessive that Olive reluctantly consented. She did not like to intrude on him, but if she did not she would have to wait until the last of his friends took leave. She was shown into a study with the usual medical equipment of arm-chairs and writing tables, and with four large Landseer engravings hanging one on each side of the room. She was tired of 'Bolton Abbey in the Olden Time,' and of vindictive stags, so she fixed her eyes on the 'Old Shepherd's Chief

Mourner,' because Mr. Ruskin had written so much and so well about it. It was not so easy, however, to fix her thoughts on it; she could not. It was some time before the doctor came; but Olive did not mind waiting—she was very near home now, and besides she had just remembered that by this visit she had innocently supplied herself with an excellent excuse for having spent so much time on her way home. Lady Brooke would naturally think that she had spent all the time which had elapsed between her leaving the Raymonds and reaching home in waiting for the poor old doctor. It was well that she had this excuse, for it was now after nine. Presently the doctor came, did something medical and comforting to the finger, and assured her that, though the injury she had received was extremely painful, it would not be permanent. 'You know the pretty story about Mrs. Disraeli and her finger?' said he.

Olive did not; so he told her how once, when going down to the House with her husband when he was about to speak on some very important occasion, Mrs. Disraeli had met with

the self-same accident which had just befallen his fair young patient. She had, however, for her husband's sake uttered no cry of pain, and had not even let him know what had happened, lest it should distract his thoughts from his speech.'

'Ah!' said Olive, 'that's what I should so like to have done, but I screamed loudly;' then she remembered that the scream was a necessary part of her programme, and that she must go home. It was half-past nine when she gratefully bade the doctor good night, and in less than five minutes more she was at home.

She went into the drawing-room at once to seek her stepmother; not anxious or excited now; her half-hour of meditation in the church had made her calm, resolute, and patiently watchful. In God's good time she would know the truth and be able to establish it. Lady Brooke was not in the drawing-room—nor was she in her own room, for when Olive went upstairs she saw her stepmother's door open, and, on going in to explain her own return, found it empty. She rang to inquire where Lady Brooke was. The maid knew nothing

about her. She said she thought she was in the drawing-room. So Olive went back there to wait and to wonder until she came. At 9.55, to her great surprise, Lady Brooke walked in, dressed in her bonnet and an old grey waterproof, under which her pretty evening-dress was ruthlessly tucked up. It was of soft pearl-grey satin, and a bit of it had dropped down unawares. She had evidently not expected to find Olive at home so early, but had intended at once to take off her out-door garments, arrange herself in invalid-fashion on the sofa again, and keep her absence from home a strict secret. So at least Olive thought from her manner, which showed her to be extremely disconcerted by this unlooked-for detection. She soon rallied and said, ‘Olive, I am sure you must wonder where I have been; I’ll tell you, dear. My head grew worse every minute, so at last I took the sudden resolution to go and ask Mr. Seymour if he could not give me something to relieve it—you know his house—it’s close by—so I put on my bonnet and this great loose cloak and went dressed anyhow, as you see; but when I got there the wretched man had

gone out to see a patient, and I did not like to come back without seeing him, so I waited there a whole hour. It was not nine when I went, and it is nearly ten o'clock now, and I have been sitting in that stuffy little consulting-room of his all that time, with nothing in the world to do or look at but four Landseer engravings. If you would like to hear an accurate description of any of them, I can give it to you, for I have studied every detail of each picture.'

Olive almost gasped at the magnitude of this untruth, for she herself had been sitting in that very room only a minute or two before ; and besides that, she knew that Mr. Seymour had not been out to see any patient, but had, on the contrary, been entertaining friends at home. 'Do you mean that you have just come from Mr. Seymour's?' she said, thinking that Lady Brooke could not possibly be guilty of so black an untruth, and that there must be some great mistake.

'Yes ; I have just left his house after waiting sixty weary minutes.'

'But why did you not leave a message for him to come here, and come away yourself?'

‘Oh, I hadn’t the heart—he has been out once this evening, and if I had done that, he would have run off here in a great hurry as soon as he came home, thinking I was *in extremis*.’

Olive wondered what to do—if she said, ‘I, too, have been at Mr. Seymour’s,’ it was like convicting Lady Brooke of falsehood. If she said nothing, the doctor himself would be sure on his next visit to say something which would reveal the fact that he had seen her. Let him do so: Olive would leave that to happen as it would. She did not know what to say, and made this very odd remark, ‘I wonder Aunt Ullathorne does not employ Mr. Seymour; her doctor lives in Wimpole Street, and it is so nice to have one close at hand.’

‘Very,’ replied Lady Brooke; ‘that’s why I chose this man; but I did not expect him to keep me looking at his trumpery works of art for sixty minutes by his own clock. By-the-by, Olive, how do you happen to be at home so early? Has anything happened?’

Olive in a few words explained the reason of her return, on which Lady Brooke cried

with great eagerness, ‘But your finger must be attended to at once. I will send for Mr. Seymour.’

Olive recoiled. It was bad enough to know that her stepmother had not spoken the truth; but it would be terrible to be present when her falsehood was openly proclaimed, as it must infallibly be if Mr. Seymour were brought. After such an exposure her stepmother and she could no longer remain together—that would be impossible! Lady Brooke’s hand was on the bell, but slowly it fell down by her side. She had not rung—probably she dared not. Had she done so, Olive would have prevented her from summoning the doctor by telling her that she had only just left his house. As it was, Lady Brooke seemed to forget about sending for him, and for her father’s sake Olive let this rag of covering for her stepmother’s perfidy remain undisturbed; but for her own outcast and forlorn mother’s sake she determined to spend night and day in watching this treacherous woman with whom she now abode.

CHAPTER XXX.

Well, which of these must take my life in hand ?
Pray God it be the better.—SWINBURNE.

MORRISON was still at St. Hilda's, and had never once wished to leave it. He had made great progress with his big picture, and had begun another from Rastwick Nab; but he was not leading quite so lonely a life as before, for he had become very intimate with his new friends in the next house, and often passed his evenings with them. He found their companionship very pleasant, and though he sometimes told himself that he ought to stay at home and do some studies in black and white, he almost always went there instead. It was delightful to him to see how much he could do to help and encourage anyone so sincere in her desire for help and guidance as Miss Rosamond Keithley. He did not think her exactly

pretty—at least, not at first—but found a great charm in her perfect honesty and freedom from all trace of conceit and affectation. Her face was one which would naturally be thought beautiful by country-folks like the Pickerings, for she had a very exquisite colour and complexion, dazzlingly white teeth, and bright well-set eyes. They were large and dark, and looked thoroughly kind and honest. She was manifestly a woman who might be trusted implicitly, and really was very pretty; but her beauty was entirely due to sweetness of nature. She was rather short, but had a good figure, a winning manner, and a splendid *physique*. She never tired, scarcely knew what a headache was; had heard of people who suffered from toothache, but was only acquainted with the malady by hearsay; and, notwithstanding her good health, was neither boastful nor boisterous, but a very quiet, gentle, helpful woman, with a marvellous gift of unselfishness. To her Morrison's conversation, coloured as it was by his intense feeling for beauty, and his knowledge on so many points on which she felt herself to be so

ignorant, was a perfect intellectual feast ; nevertheless, as she knew her aunt enjoyed talking, she for the most part contented herself with listening in delighted silence. Mrs. Keithley talked, questioned, and provoked discussion, and her niece played the part of listener until conversation either became too deep or too technical for her aunt, and then she herself spoke, and always in a way which proved to Morrison that she had been taking the closest interest in all that had gone before.

It is always flattering to any man, young or old, to see a pair of bright eyes grow brighter when he has said anything remarkably well, and Miss Keithley very often thought that he said things remarkably well. Morrison began to look forward to the evening with pleasure, instead of regarding it—and all the time when the sun was absent from the sky—as little else than a certain number of hours during which he was torn away from the dear delight of colour. Miss Keithley was well acquainted with all that is best in literature and art, and was able to regard the course of the world with an intelligent interest. She and her quiet aunt made him more in love than ever with a

life spent far from London and its distractions. Here were magnificent sights always before his eyes—he could work and paint, and live entirely free from all sordid care, for his expenses were almost nothing. It seemed monstrous to think of ever going back to London, with its stuccoed gentility and clamorous demands for the outlay of money which brings you neither comfort nor pleasure. Life at St. Hilda's was altogether to his taste, and none the less so because of the absence of everything which reminded him of struggle, or competition, or desire of name or place.

It was too cold for steady painting out of doors, but by not sitting too long at one time he could manage to get some study of detail on the spot; besides, every day brought with it some new effect of light or colour, and the splendour of the wintry sunsets was enough of itself to keep him where he was. Miss Keithley also was happier in her painting than ever she had been before. Morrison had given her exactly the help which she most needed, and his example, and the sight of his work, stimulated her to fresh effort.

About two o'clock one afternoon she was

on her way out, when at the door of the next house she saw Mrs. Pickering, with angry little eyes, and face warmed up by indignation to a red that was by no means becoming. She was scolding at the top of her voice, and loudly proclaiming that deeds must follow words, unless she was attended to at once. A meek-looking woman with a baby in her arms, and two children hanging on her skirts, was receiving the outpourings of her wrath.

‘It’s a sin and a shame that anyone who slaves away as Mr. Merrison does should be teased in this way, with a nasty, mischievous, good-for-nothing little abominable tyke like your Tommy, and when he comes in I’ll just tell him what a set I have every day to get that lad to do his duty! If I had had my way, I’d ha’ made short work of him a very long time ago—that I would, I can tell you!’

Humbly the poor woman urged that it was not her fault—that she did her best; but with no head (husband) to help her, and such a heavy handful of bairns to strive and struggle with, it was no wonder that a big boy like Tommy took advantage of her sometimes.

‘I’d advantage him!’ cried Mrs. Pickering; ‘I’d give him a good sound warming; and if you like, I’ll do it! Just you send him here, and, my word, if once I begin, if I don’t make him know that it’s me that’s at him, and not you!’

‘Oh, honey, no!’ cried the or mother, wiping her heated face with a ragged old shawl. ‘Many’s the time I’ve done all that myself, but it’s all to no use! He cares nothing for a thrashing when once the bat (blow) is off him, not he!’

‘What is the matter?’ inquired Miss Keithley

‘The matter’s this, Miss Keithley: this good woman has a lad whom Mr. Merrison hires for to carry his things to him at Rastwick; he has half-a-crown a week, and nothing to do to earn it but to walk hisself along the cliffs every afternoon when it is fine, to meet Mr. Merrison, and give him the one bag and fetch back another that Mr. Merrison took out with him after breakfast—that’s all; and this afternoon my young gentleman has chosen to play truant.’

Morrison was painting a waterfall a mile

beyond Rastwick in the morning, and, to lighten his heavy burden, did not carry with him the things he wanted in the afternoon, but had engaged this boy of nine, who had, however, in spite of Mrs. Pickering's strong language, only once before failed him.

‘Where is the boy?’

‘Gone off in a boat with some men to dig for bait, and Mr. Merrison will have to do without his sketching things. I am that vexed I could just take and skin the boy!’

‘Couldn’t you go?’ said Rose Keithley to the boy’s mother.

‘Me, ma’am? I couldn’t leave my bairns; they’d all do nothing but shout and cry till they saw me back again with them. There’s plenty of boys——’

‘There’s no boys, nor men neither, to be had that I’d trust with these things! They’d set the bag down on the church steps and begin to play chuckie-stones; besides, none of them would know where to take it.’

‘What are the things?’ cried Rose Keithley.
‘Are they too heavy for me to carry? They can’t be, if a boy could carry them.’

On this, Mrs. Pickering produced a sketching bag, carefully padlocked, lest the young gentleman should be seized with a sudden desire to finger its contents. Inside were two half-imperial drawing-boards; they were heavy, but not beyond Rose Keithley's strength. She knew exactly where to find Morrison, for he had discussed the point of view of his drawing with her; so, after charging the two women to be sure to send the boy to bring back the sketching things used in the morning, she set out, hoping to arrive almost as soon as he would have done. It was a lovely afternoon, warm for the time of year, and everything looked doubly beautiful for the soft veil of mist which was caused by the frostiness of the air. The sun was shining down on the old town, and wherever it was strong enough to break away this silvery veil, the intense red of the houses blazed forth. Such splendour of colour was almost inconceivable; the houses glowed like richly-tinted fruits; golden browns and ambers ran into purple reds and glorified crimsons; wreaths of smoke from the chimneys mingled strangely with the filmy mist, and the sunbeams caught

both and tinged them with delicate gold, and they faded away in one place, disclosing new wealth of colour, or hid what had the minute before seemed the very eye of the picture, but which, now that some new beauty had sprung into existence to take its place, was never so much as missed. There were one or two fishing-boats in the river, quietly making their way out to sea for the night. Their sails, of every shade of velvety chocolate-brown, with golden lights on them, were glorious to behold. Every step of Rosamond Keithley's way brought her some such sight as this; but she did not stop to watch or dwell on her enjoyment, but walked briskly along the quay. It was delightful to her to be of service to any fellow-artist, most of all to William Morrison. The lightness and brightness of the air, and the loveliness of all she saw, intoxicated her. It was market-day, and the quay was crowded. The bridge, when she came to it, was open, and over the heads of the black mass of men and women before her she saw the rich brown sails and taper masts of two boats which were gliding gracefully through. One of the chief

charms of St. Hilda's is the way in which the sea life runs into the town life; and so closely are the two interwoven, that the mere summer visitor finds himself hearing so much of the toils and dangers of the towns-folk, that when he sees the boats making for the harbour's mouth his heart goes with them.

When once the bridge was shut, it was thronged with one dense struggling mass of carts, carriages, horses, and men, each and all of which had been waiting till the thoroughfare was restored. Rosamond Keithley and her sketching-bag pressed on with the rest. She hurried on as fast as she could, and climbed up the two hundred steps which led to the old church, tearing her eyes away from everything which tempted her to linger. She did not look at the church; she scarcely glanced at the serried ranks of grave-stones—her eyes caught sight of some of the inscriptions which were so familiar to her, and yet always so touching—they nearly all told of a tragedy. St. Hilda's men rarely die in their beds—wrecked on the Hasborough Sands—drowned by the upsetting of the life-boat with

eleven others—such were the records which met her quick young glance. She began to feel very sad, though for her the sun was still shining. She passed the old green with its cross, and the abbey, and then made her way to the cliffs. A curious effect met her here : the sunlight seemed pressed down very close to the earth by heavy white mists, but was much more intense for being less diffused. She had never enjoyed a walk so much before. She was now on the very cliffs which had so short a while ago been her most bitter enemies, shutting her in from all escape. The bag began to feel rather heavy ; but it was Mr. Morrison's, and she was doing him a slight service, and this thought gave her such pleasure that she almost danced along the fields, and at last she came upon him unexpectedly, for he had walked a short distance to meet the boy. He was standing close by the edge of the cliff, waiting and watching, for the sun was now exactly as he wanted it, and he was longing to get to work. He started when he saw Miss Keithley with his bag on her arm:

‘My dear Miss Keithley! you surely have

not carried that bag here? Your arm must be nearly broken! Oh, I am so sorry!’

A strange fit of shyness came over Rosamond Keithley, and she almost wished she had not done it, or rather that she could have hidden it from him; but she soon recovered herself, and said simply, ‘It is nothing; I was coming out, anyhow. I am used to carrying things of this kind. Your boy had gone somewhere else, and poor Mrs. Pickering was afraid you would want your bag.’

‘I certainly wanted it, I was getting quite anxious about it, and am most grateful to you—but it is so heavy—you can’t think how ashamed I am!’

‘Don’t be ashamed—don’t think about it at all! It has been such a pleasure to me! If I carried your bag every day of my life, I should not have done a hundredth part of what you have done for me. But I shall do more harm than good if I make you lose your time in talking—good-bye—I ordered the boy’s mother to send him to carry back your morning’s things—what a quantity you have!’

‘Yes, I have three or four sketches going;

but they are not all on heavy boards. The fall with a lot of water, the fall with hardly any, and a sunny one with the mill, and a dull one—that's the way to be upsides with the weather !'

'Good-bye,' again said Miss Keithley, seeing that politeness was making him diffuse in order to detain her.

'No,' said Morrison, 'please don't go back directly ; let me have the pleasure of escorting you home—besides, I want you to have a cup of tea.'

'Tea?'

'Yes, tea. It will warm you, and you won't mind seeing the sun set behind those cliffs.'

'I should think not !' said she ; but that he might feel free to go on with his work she added, 'I think I will walk on to the next point, and then come back to you.' The next point was more than a mile off, and he knew why she had gone, and was deeply grateful for her thoughtfulness, for, great as was his regard for her, he wanted to be alone for a while.

The sunset was a fine one, and when it was over he found Miss Keithley by his side. She

had returned from her walk half an hour before, but had not liked to draw near whilst he was so busy. Somehow he divined this—what a treasure of a girl she was!

‘Thanks to your great kindness,’ said he, ‘I have had a very good afternoon. I should have been wretchedly badly off without my bag.’

‘Oh, have you? You can’t think how pleased I am! Did the boy come?’

‘Yes; and he has taken back everything but the things you brought. I sent him to order our tea.’

Morrison packed up his sketches, and took her to a cottage hard by. ‘Look at the edging of that flower-border,’ said he; ‘what an old-world place St. Hilda’s is!’ A narrow flower-bed ran parallel with the path to the cottage door, and its border was composed of a series of hard grey bones, which had once been the backbone of a saurian. The cottager gave them some tea, and then they began their walk back to the town. What a change had come over everything since the sun had set! Nothing of its glory remained but one dusky amber bar

across the westward sky. The short grass was already becoming white and crisp under their feet, and chill mists were creeping around them. The abbey looked a mere ugly grey wreck, cold and dull. No living creature was to be seen, but some cows waiting for their summons to the milking byre. They gazed on Morrison and his companion with an air of calm, well-considered approval. All might be grey and cold around them, but these two felt unusually light-hearted and buoyant. Her presence was infinitely soothing to him—she had never been so happy in her life.

‘Have all artists as delightful a time of it as you have, Mr. Morrison?’ she asked. He almost started, and said, ‘I have been very happy since I came here, thanks to you, I think; but in London I have vexations without end, great and small.’

‘What a shame! Poets and painters ought to be specially protected from all annoyances by the State. But what can you have to disturb you?’

‘Oh! noises, and fogs, and society, and, worst of all, myself. I really think I shall

never go back—London is not the place for me—I am convinced of that.’

‘St. Hilda’s is perfect! We are going to stay a year.’

‘Quite perfect! It has everything a painter ought to want—sky, sea and rocks, picturesque boats and figures, and then there are splendid moors within reach—I don’t see what more a man can desire, unless it be a run into Scotland now and then to refresh himself with the sight of a mountain.’

‘But you would be dull—you would want society.’

‘I suppose I should,’ said he, and thought of Olive; but such a life would not be to her taste—nor would any which he could give her. How few women, indeed, would regard a prolonged stay in St. Hilda’s as anything but exile from all that made existence attractive! He glanced at the girl by his side, and thought that for many a long day he had not seen anyone whose tastes were so like his own.

‘How silent you are!’ said she; ‘do tell me what you are thinking.’ He found it remarkably difficult to reply to this, so plunged

boldly into fiction and said, ‘Of the strange way in which old things and new are blended here. I think that is what makes the great charm of the place. They utilise the last remaining fragments of an antediluvian monster, and even the very devils routed by St. Hilda are turned into one of the main articles of commerce of the modern town.’

‘Oh, the ammonites; but I like them best lying below the cliffs down which they are said to have plunged in their flight. You like the blending of old and new, but the old is being rapidly hustled out of sight—don’t let us think of disagreeable things, though.’

‘No. Not on a happy day like this. What a delightful walk we have had!’ He was but putting her own thought into words.

‘I am inclined to think that church one of the most picturesque things in St. Hilda’s,’ said Rose Keithley, and Morrison quite loved her for the speech. No one but an artist could have made it; the very first aspiration of the ordinary sea-side visitor is to see it pulled down. It was indeed a most picturesque church, with strange growths clinging to the original fabric,

having been eked out and added to whenever more space was required, and that, as it would seem, by the happy thoughts and flashes of inspiration of some adroit ship's carpenter. Were twenty new sittings desirable, what more natural than to seize on a huge fragment of some wreck, and affix it, as it would appear, almost wholesale. Were these new seats still insufficient, then repeat the experiment, and so on *ad infinitum*, the result being a building unrivalled in quaintness and defiance of all ordinary rules. Inside it looked more like the interior of a ship than anything else; and outside, as seen from the path by the abbey, it looked like a hen sitting on a large brood of chickens, the chickens being represented by the odd corners and gables which jutted out on all sides, peeping out from the shelter of the main structure, like so many of those tiny creatures from beneath their mother's wings. Rose Keithley had always thought she knew St. Hilda's well; but Morrison was able to show her things which she had never seen before, and to tell stories and legends which made the place a thousand-fold more interesting to her. He showed her the

window where the pale ghost of the saint is said to be sometimes seen, and the low-lying gratings leading to the underground chambers where the smugglers used to hide their stores, and the graving-dock where the vessel was built that carried Captain Cook round the world. Their walk was a long one, but it seemed to come to an end very quickly. He had thoroughly enjoyed it. Arrived at her own door, Rose Keithley put out a pretty little hand and said, ‘Good-bye, Mr. Morrison: you will come in for a while this evening?’ There was something in her face which for the moment riveted Morrison’s eyes to it. He felt strongly inclined to accept her invitation, but controlled himself and said, ‘Not to-night, thank you: I must deny myself. I have some work which must be done; I will come in to-morrow, if I may?’

‘If you may!’ cried she. ‘Why, your visits are one of the greatest pleasures we have. You will come to-morrow?’

‘Yes, without fail! I shall look forward to the time, you may be sure of that.’

She went in, and stooping over her aunt’s chair to kiss her, exclaimed, ‘I have had a long

walk with Mr. Morrison, aunt ! Such a delightful one ! Oh, I am so happy !’

Mrs. Keithley looked happy too, and said, ‘I really think he is very fond of you, Rose ! I have thought so for at least a fortnight.’

Rosamond Keithley turned away with a very red face. She did not quite know what she herself thought about this, but she knew what she wished to think.

As for Morrison, he went in and did not work at all, unless thinking may be regarded as work. He could not but see that in many respects Rosamond Keithley was, of all women, the one best suited to be his wife. Their tastes were identical, the same things would suffice to make both happy. She was charming in every way, and good and noble also. He could see no fault in her whatsoever ; and though he did not love her, he had as he believed made great progress towards that highly desirable state in which Olive Brooke would be altogether banished from his mind. There was every temptation now to drift into a course which would divide him from her for ever. He had come to the conclusion that it would be

madness to think of her, for this if for no other reason, that no success which he could possibly win in the springtime of his youth would be great enough to justify him in asking her to be his wife. He could not—what landscape painter ever could?—take the world by storm as it was possible for a great figure painter to do. All that he himself had to give the world was prized by too small a number of his fellow-creatures, and cost too long a period of the most humble apprenticeship, to admit of any success worth having being obtained before youth was over, and middle life well begun. His loneliness and the want of near relations had made him, in spite of elasticity of nature and sanguine temperament, a little too much inclined to forecast the future, and to accept as a possibility that he might be obliged to seek for happiness in his art alone; and yet, with all his love of natural beauty, he hated the thought of living a life in which every noble thought and aspiration was given in cultivated selfishness to that object. Rosamond Keithley might have been sent on purpose to save him! What if he allowed himself to love? what if he could win

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as a helpmate the good sweet girl from whom he had so lately parted, with whom he could live in the bonds of calm affection, who would help him as only a quiet, loving woman can help, and who would be perfectly content to pass her days in retirement, seeing no one but himself? For art's sake, for true happiness' sake, this was assuredly the wiser course; he could not go on as he was doing now, with all his peace at the mercy of a chance event to destroy it;—once plighted to another, he would never again be distracted by the thought of Olive. The evening wore on: yes, Rose Keithley was infinitely better suited to him, and he half hoped that she might be brought to care for him; at any rate, he was resolved to try if she could not. The more he thought of this, the more firm he became in his resolution. Nothing should shake him now. He went to bed happy; he had chosen the pleasant ways of peace.

He rose next morning, feeling happier than he had done for weeks, and steadfast in his purpose of the evening before. He thoroughly admired and respected Rosamond Keithley; he even began not to be so very certain that he

did not love her just a little. It was a mighty relief to have come to this decision, and to feel himself well rid of all that had disquieted him so long. He swallowed a cup of tea, and then went to the window to see if Rose Keithley was to be seen, and if the drawing with which she was busy was already set out in the bay window. It was there; so, too, were glass and palette; but the industrious artist herself was not. 'She is looking after her aunt's breakfast,' thought he. 'There is not a trace of selfishness in that girl's composition!' He began to long for the evening, and to wonder if she would ever care for him. As he stood by the window, the postman toiled up the steps, and presently a letter was brought to 'Mr. Merrison': a London letter, re-directed by his servant, who had sorry skill in penmanship. It had been mis-sent, and had passed through many post-offices, had been to St. Helier's and St. Helen's, and had even made a struggle to get to St. Kilda: but the common sense of North British postmasters had been against the idea of seeking anyone there at that time of the year, and at last, after a delay of a whole fortnight, it had

reached Morrison at St. Hilda's. He turned it round and round, and inspected the pithy comments of each office which had repelled it. He did not expect the inside to be more interesting than the out, but he opened it, and found it was from Mrs. Brooke.

‘Dear Mr. Morrison,’ she said, ‘We are at home again, and trying to recommence our Tuesday evenings. I hope you will give us the pleasure of your company at the next, on February the 6th, at 9.—Yours ever truly, SELINA EGERTON BROOKE.

‘P.S. I open my note to say that my niece, Miss Olive Brooke, has just been here, and has begged me to tell you that she hopes you will accept my invitation, for there is something which she particularly wishes to say to you.’

He read this, and then, with eyes which would scarcely serve his turn, and mind confused with excitement, tried to grasp on what day he was invited. February the 6th. It was February the 6th that very day, and he was 360 miles from London. Few trains left St. Hilda's in winter, and the only one which would take him to London in time went at 8.45. It was

now 8.40. He caught up his hat and coat, called to Mrs. Pickering that he was going away for a few days, ran off to the station, arrived there just in time to take a ticket and clamber into a carriage, and thus in five minutes his dream of a happiness which was to be enjoyed without Olive came to an abrupt end.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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